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THE FATAL THREE

A Novel

BY THE AUTHOR OF

“LADY AUDLEY’S SECRET,” “VIXEN,”

“ISHMAEL,” “MOHAWKS,”

ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.

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BOOK THE SECOND.

LACHESIS; OR THE METER OF DESTINY.

CHAPTER I.

A WIFE AND NO WIFE.

MR. CASTELLANI'S existence was one of those social problems about which the idle world loves to speculate. There are a good many people in London to whom the idea of a fourth dimension is not half so interesting as the notion of a man who lives by his wits, and yet contrives to get himself dressed by a good tailor, and to obtain a footing in some of the best houses at the smart end of the town. This problem César Castellani had offered to the polite world of London for the last three seasons.

Who is Mr. Castellani ? was a question still asked by a good many people who invited the gentleman to their houses, and made much of him. He had not forced his way into society ; nobody had the right to describe him as a pushing person. He had slipped so insidiously into his place in the social

orbit that people had not yet left off wondering how he came there, or who had been his sponsors. This kind of speculation always stimulates the invention of the clever people ; and these affected to know a good deal more about Mr. Castellani than he knew about himself.

“ He came with magnificent credentials, and an account was opened for him at Coutts’s before he arrived,” said Magnus Dudley, the society poet, flinging back his long hair with a lazy movement of the large languid head. “ Of course, you know that he is a natural son of Cavour’s ?”

“ Indeed ! No, I never heard *that*. He is not like Cavour.”

“ Of course not, but he is the image of his mother—one of the handsomest women in Italy—a Duchess, and daughter of a Roman Prince, who could trace his descent in an unbroken line from Germanicus. Castellani has the blood of Caligula in his veins.”

“ He looks like it ; but I have heard on pretty good authority that he is the son of a Milanese music-master.”

“There are people who will tell you his father wheeled a barrow and sold penny ices in White-chapel,” retorted Magnus. “People will say anything.”

Thus and in much otherwise did society speculate; and in the meantime Mr. Castellani’s circle was always widening. His book had been just audacious enough and just clever enough to hit the gold in the literary target. *Nepenthe* had been one of the successes of the season before last: and Mr. Castellani was henceforth to be known as the author of *Nepenthe*. He had touched upon many things below the stars, and some things beyond them. He had written of other worlds with the confidence of a man who had been there. He had written of women with the air of a Café de Paris Solomon; and he had written of men as if he had never met one.

A man who could write a successful book, and could sing and play divinely, was a person to be cultivated in feminine society. Very few men cared to be intimate with Mr. Castellani, but among women his influence was indisputable. He treated them with a courtly deference which charmed them, and

he made them his slaves. No Oriental despot ever ruled more completely than César Castellani did in half-a-dozen of those drawing-rooms which give the tone to scores of other drawing-rooms between Mayfair and Earl's Court. He contrived to be in request from the dawn to the close of the London season. He had made a favour of going to Riverdale; and now, although it suited his purpose to be there, he made a favour of staying.

"If it were not for the delight of being here, I should be in one of the remotest valleys in the Tyrol," he told Mrs. Hillersdon. "I have never stayed in England so long after the end of the season. A wild longing to break loose from the bonds of Philistinism generally seizes me at this time of the year. I want to go away, and away, and ever away from my fellow-men. I should like to go and live in a tomb, like the girl in Ouida's *In Maremma*. My thirst for solitude is a disease."

This from a man who spent the greater part of his existence dawdling in drawing-rooms and boudoirs sounded paradoxical; but paradoxes are accepted graciously from a man who has written the book of

the season. Louise Hillersdon treated Castellani like a favourite son. At his bidding she brought out the old guitar which had slumbered in its case for nearly a decade, and sang the old Spanish songs, and struck the strings with the old dashing sweep of a delicate hand, and graceful curve of a rounded arm.

“When you sing I could believe you as young as Helen when Paris stole her,” said Castellani, lolling along the sofa beside the low chair in which she was sitting; “I cease to envy the men who knew you when you were a girl.”

“My dear Castellani, I feel old enough to be your grandmother; unless you are really the person I sometimes take you for—”

“Who may that be?”

“The Wandering Jew.”

“No matter what my creed or where I have wandered, since I am so happy as to find a haven here. Granted that I can remember Nero’s beautiful Empress, and Faustina, and all that procession of fair women who illumine the Dark Ages—and Mary of Scotland, and Emma Hamilton, blonde and brunette,

pathetic and *espiègle*, every type, and every variety. It is enough for me to find perfection here."

"If you only knew how sick I am of that kind of nonsense!" said Mrs. Hillersdon, smiling at him, half in amusement, half in scorn.

"O, I know that you have drunk the wine of men's worship to satiety! Yet if you and I had lived upon the same plane, I would have taught you that among a hundred adorers one could love you better than all the rest. But it is too late. Our souls may meet and touch perhaps thousands of years hence in a new incarnation."

"Do you talk this kind of nonsense to Mrs. Greswold or her niece?"

"No; with them I am all dulness and propriety. Neither lady is *simpatica*. Miss Ransome is a frank, good-natured girl—much too frank—with all the faults of her species. I find the genus girl universally detestable."

"Miss Ransome has about fifteen hundred a year. I suppose you know that?"

"Has she really? If ever I marry I hope to do better than that," answered César with easy inso-

lence. "She would be a very nice match for a country parson; that Mr. Rollinson, for instance, who is getting up the concert."

"Then Miss Ransome is not your attraction at Enderby? It is Mrs. Greswold who draws you."

"Why should I be drawn?" he asked, with his languid air. "I go there in sheer idleness. They like me to make music for them; they fool me and praise me; and it is pleasant to be fooled by two pretty women."

"Does Mrs. Greswold take any part in the fooling? She looks like marble."

"There is fire under that marble. Mrs. Greswold is romantically in love with her husband: but that is a complaint which is not incurable."

"He is not an agreeable man," said Louise, remembering how long George Greswold and his wife had kept aloof from her. "And he does not look a happy man."

"He is not happy."

"You know something about him—more than we all know?" asked Louise, with keen curiosity.

"Not much. I met him at Nice before he came

into his property. He was not a very fortunate person at that time, and he doesn't care to be reminded of it now."

"Was he out-at-elbows, or in debt?"

"Neither. His troubles did not take that form. But I am not a gossip. Let the past be past, as Goethe says. We can't change it, and it is charity to forget it. If we are not sure about what we touch and hear and see—or fancy we hear and touch and see—in the present, how much less can we be sure of any reality or external existence in the past! It is all done away with—vanished. How can we know that it ever was? A grave here and there is the only witness; and even the grave and the name on the headstone may be only a projection of our own consciousness. We are such stuff as dreams are made of."

"That is a politely circuitous manner of refusing to tell me anything about Mr. Greswold when his name was Ransome. No matter. I shall find other people who know the scandal, I have no doubt. Your prevarication assures me that there was a scandal."

This was on the eve of the concert at Enderby, at about the same hour when George Greswold showed Mildred his first wife's portrait. Castellani and his hostess were alone together in the lady's morning-room, while Hillersdon and his other guests were in the billiard-room on the opposite side of a broad corridor. Mrs. Hillersdon had a way of turning over her visitors to her husband when they bored her. Gusts of loud talk and louder laughter came across the corridor now and again as they played pool. There were times when Louise was too tired of life to endure the burden of commonplace society. She liked to dream over a novel. She liked to talk with a clever young man like Castellani. His flatteries amused her, and brought back a faint flavour of youth and a dim remembrance of the day when all men praised her, when she had known herself without a rival. Now other women were beautiful, and she was only a tradition. She had toiled hard to live down her past, to make the world forget that she had ever been Louise Lorraine : yet there were moments in which she felt angry to find that old personality of hers so utterly forgotten, when she

was tempted to cry out, "What rubbish you talk about your Mrs. Egremont, your Mrs. Linley Varden, your professional beauties and fine lady actresses. Have you never heard of ME—Louise Lorraine?"

The drawing-rooms at Enderby Manor had been so transformed under Mr. Castellani's superintendence, and with the help of his own dexterous hands, that there was a unanimous expression of surprise from the county families as they entered that region of subdued light and æsthetic draperies between three and half-past three o'clock on the afternoon of the concert.

The Broadwood grand stood on a platform in front of a large bay-window, draped as no other hand could drape a piano, with embroidered Persian curtains and many-hued Algerian stuffs, striped with gold; and against the sweeping folds of drapery rose a group of tall golden lilies out of a shallow yellow vase. A cluster of gloxinias were massed near the end of the piano, and a few of the most artistic chairs in the house were placed about for the performers. The platform, instead of being as other platforms, in

a straight line across one side of the room, was placed diagonally, so as to present the picturesque effect of an angle in the background, an angle lighted with clusters of wax-candles, against a forest of palms.

All the windows had been darkened save those in the further drawing-room, which opened into the garden, and even these were shaded by Spanish hoods, letting in coolness and the scent of flowers, with but little daylight. Thus the only bright light was on the platform.

The auditorium was arranged with a certain artistic carelessness: the chairs in curved lines to accommodate the diagonal line of the platform; and this fact, in conjunction with the prettiness of the stage, put every one in good temper before the concert began.

The concert was as other concerts: clever amateur singing, excellent amateur playing, fine voices cultivated to a certain point, and stopping just short of perfect training.

César Castellani's three little songs—words by Heine—music, Schubert and Jensen—were the hit of

the afternoon. There were few eyes that were unclouded by tears, even among those listeners to whom the words were in an unknown language. The pathos was in the voice of the singer.

The duet was performed with *aplomb*, and elicited an encore, on which Pamela and Castellani sang the old-fashioned "Flow on, thou shining river," which pleased elderly people, moving them like a reminiscence of long-vanished youth.

Pamela's heart beat furiously as she heard the applause, and she curtsied herself off the platform in a whirl of delight. She felt that it was in her to be a great public singer—a second Patti—if—if she could be taught and trained by Castellani. Her head was full of vague ideas—a life devoted to music—three years' hard study in Italy—a *début* at La Scala—a world-wide renown achieved in a single night. She even wondered how to Italianise her name. Ransomini? No, that would hardly do. Pamelani—Pameletta? What awkward names they were—christian and surname both!

And then, crimsoning at the mere thought, she saw in large letters, "MADAME CASTELLANI."

How much easier to make a great name in the operatic world with a husband to fight one's battles and get the better of managers!

"With an income of one's own it ought to be easy to make one's way," thought Pamela, as she stood behind the long table in the dining-room, dispensing tea and coffee, with the assistance of maids and footmen.

Her head was so full of these bewildering visions that she was a little less on the alert than she ought to have been for shillings and half-crowns, whereby a few elderly ladies got their tea and coffee for nothing, not being asked for payment, and preferring to consider the entertainment gratis.

Mildred's part of the concert was performed to perfection—not a false note in an accompaniment, or a fault in the *tempo*. Lady Millborough, a very exacting personage, declared she had never been so well supported in her *cheval de bataille*, the finale to *La Cenerentola*. But many among the audience remarked that they had never seen Mrs. Greswold look so ill; and both Rollinson and Castellani were seriously concerned about her.

"You are as white as marble," said the Italian.
"I know you are suffering."

"I assure you it is nothing. I have not been feeling very well lately, and I had a sleepless night. There is nothing that need give any one the slightest concern. You may be sure I shall not break down. I am very much interested in the painted window," she added, with a faint smile.

"It is not that I fear," said Castellani, in a lower voice. "It is of you and your suffering I am thinking."

George Greswold did not appear at the concert: he was engaged elsewhere.

"I cannot think how Uncle George allowed himself to have an appointment at Salisbury this afternoon," said Pamela. "I know he doats on music."

"Perhaps he doesn't doat upon it quite so well as to like to see his house turned topsy-turvy," said Lady Millborough, who would have allowed every philanthropic scheme in the country to collapse for want of cash rather than suffer her drawing-room to be pulled about by amateur scene-shifters.

Mrs. Hillersdon and her party occupied a prominent position near the platform ; but that lady was too clever to make herself conspicuous. She talked to the people who were disposed to friendliness—their numbers had increased with the advancing years—and she placidly ignored those who still held themselves aloof from “that horrid woman.” Nor did she in any way appropriate Castellani as her special *protégé* when the people round her were praising him. She took everything that happened with the repose which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere, and may often be found among women whom the Vere de Veres despise.

All was over: the last of the carriages had rolled away. Castellani had been carried off in Mrs. Hillersdon’s barouche, no one inviting him to stay at the Manor House. Rollinson lingered to repeat his effusive thanks for Mrs. Greswold’s help.

“It has been a glorious success,” he exclaimed ; “glorious ! Who would have thought there was so much amateur talent available within thirty miles ? And Castellani was a grand acquisition. We shall

clear at least seventy pounds for the window. I don't know how I can ever thank you enough for giving us the use of your lovely rooms, Mrs. Greswold, and for letting us pull them about as we liked."

"That did not matter—much," Mildred said faintly, as she stood by the drawing-room door in the evening light, the curate lingering to reiterate the assurance of his gratitude. "Everything can be arranged again—easily."

She was thinking, with a dull aching at her heart, that to her the pulling about and disarrangement of those familiar rooms hardly mattered at all. They were her rooms no longer. Enderby was never more to be her home. It had been her happy home for thirteen gracious years—years clouded with but one natural sorrow, in the loss of her beloved father. And now that father's ghost rose up before her, and said, "The sins of the fathers shall be visited upon the children, and because of my sin you must go forth from your happy home and forsake the husband of your heart."

She gave the curate an icy hand, and turned from him without another word.

“Poor soul, she is dead-beat!” thought Rollinson, as he trudged home to his lodgings over a joiner and builder’s shop: airy and comfortable rooms enough, but odorous of sawdust, and a little too near the noises of the workshop.

He could but think it odd that he had not been asked to dine at the Manor, as he would have been in the ordinary course of events. He had told the builder’s wife that he should most likely dine out, whereupon that friendly soul had answered, “Why, of course they’ll ask you, Mr. Rollinson. You know they’re always glad to see you.”

And now he had to return to solitude and a fresh-killed chop.

It was seven o’clock, and George Greswold had not yet come home from Salisbury. Very few words had passed between him and his wife since she fell fainting at his feet last night. He had summoned her maid, and between them they had brought her back to consciousness, and half carried her to her room. She would give no explanation of her fainting-fit when the maid had left the room, and she

was lying on her bed, white and calm, with her husband sitting by her side. She told him that she was tired, and that a sudden giddiness had come upon her. That was all he could get from her.

“If you will ask me no questions, and leave me quite alone, I will try to sleep, so that I may be fit for my work in the concert to-morrow,” she pleaded. “I would not disappoint them for worlds.”

“I don’t think you need be over-anxious about them,” said her husband bitterly. “There is more at stake than a painted window: there is your peace and mine. Answer me only one question,” he said, with intensity of purpose: “had your fainting-fit anything to do with the portrait of my first wife?”

“I will tell you everything—after the concert to-morrow,” she answered; “for God’s sake leave me to myself till then.”

“Let it be as you will,” he answered, rising suddenly, wounded by her reticence.

He left the room without another word. She sprang up from her bed directly he was gone, ran to the door and locked it, and then flung herself on her

knees upon the prie-dieu chair at the foot of a large ivory crucifix which hung in a deep recess beside the old-fashioned fireplace.

Here she knelt, in tears and prayer, deep into the night. Then for an hour or more she walked up and down the room, absorbed in thought, by the dim light of the night-lamp.

When the morning light came she went to a bookcase in a little closet of a room opening out of the spacious old bedroom—a case containing only devotional books, and of these she took out volume after volume—Taylor's *Rule of Conscience*, Hooker's *Religious Polity*, Butler, Paley—one after another, turning over the leaves, looking through the indexes—searching for something which she seemed unable to find anywhere.

“What need have I to see what others have thought?” she said to herself at last, after repeated failure; “Clement Cancellor knows the right. I could have no better guide than his opinion, and he has spoken. What other law do I need? His law is the law of God.”

Not once did her eyes close in sleep all through

that night, or in the morning hours before breakfast. She made an excuse for breakfasting in her dressing-room, a large, airy apartment, half boudoir. She was told that Mr. Greswold had gone out early to see some horses at Salisbury, and would not be back till dinner-time. He was to be met at the station at half-past seven.

She had her morning to herself. Pamela was rehearsing her part in the duet, and in "Flow on, thou shining river," which was to be sung in the event of an encore. That occupation, and the arrangement of her toilet, occupied the young lady till luncheon—allowing for half-hourly rushes about the lawn and shrubberies with Box, whose health required activity, and whose social instincts yearned for companionship.

"He can't get on with only Cassandra; she hasn't intellect enough for him," said Pamela.

It was only ten minutes before the arrival of the performers that Mrs. Greswold went down-stairs, pale as ashes, but ready for the ordeal. She had put on a white gown with a little scarlet ribbon about it, lest black should make her pallor too conspicuous.

And now it was seven o'clock, and she was alone. The curate had been right in pronouncing her dead-beat; but she had some work before her yet. She had been writing letters in the morning. Two of these she now placed on the mantelpiece in her bedroom: one addressed to her husband, the other to Pamela.

She had a bag packed—not one of those formidable dressing-bags which weigh fifteen to twenty pounds—but a light Russia-leather bag, just large enough to contain the essentials of the toilet. She put on a neat little black bonnet and a travelling-cloak, and took her bag and umbrella, and went down to the hall. She had given orders that the carriage should call for her before going to the station, and she was at the door ready to step into it when it came round.

She told the groom that she was to be put down at Ivy Cottage, and was driven off unseen by the household, who were all indulging in a prolonged tea-drinking after the excitement of the concert.

Ivy Cottage was within five minutes' walk of Romsey Station: a little red cottage, newly built,

with three or four ivy plants languishing upon a slack-baked brick wall, and just enough garden for the proverbial cat to disport himself in at his ease—the swinging of cats being no longer a popular English sport. There was nothing strange in Mrs. Greswold alighting at Ivy Cottage—unless it were the hour of her visit—for the small brick box was occupied by two maiden ladies of small means: one a confirmed invalid; the other her patient nurse; whom the lady of Enderby Manor often visited, and in whom she was known to be warmly interested.

The coachman concluded that his mistress was going to spend a quarter of an hour with the two old ladies, while he went on and waited for his master at the station, and that he was to call for her on his return. He did not even ask for her orders upon this point, taking them for granted.

He was ten minutes too soon at the station, as every well-conducted coachman ought to be.

“I’m to call for my mistress, sir,” he said, as Mr. Greswold stepped into the brougham.

“Where?”

“At Ivy Cottage, sir: Miss Fisher’s.”

“Very good.”

The brougham pulled up at Ivy Cottage; and the groom got down and knocked a resounding peal upon the Queen Anne knocker, it being hardly possible nowadays to find a knocker that is not after the style of Queen Anne, or a newly-built twenty-five pound a year cottage in any part of rural England that does not offer a faint reminiscence of Bedford Park.

The groom made his inquiry of the startled little maid-of-all-work, fourteen years old last birthday, and already aspiring to better herself as a vegetable-maid in a nobleman's family.

Mrs. Greswold had not been at Ivy Cottage that evening.

George Greswold was out of the brougham by this time, hearing the girl's answer.

“Stop where you are,” he said to the coachman, and ran back to the station, an evil augury in his mind.

He went to the up-platform, the platform at which he had alighted ten minutes before.

“Did you see Mrs. Greswold here just now?” he

asked the station-master, with as natural an air as he could command.

“Yes, sir. She got into the up-train, sir; the train by which you came. She came out of the waiting-room, sir, the minute after you left the platform. You must just have missed her.”

“Yes, I have just missed her.”

He walked up and down the length of the platform two or three times in the thickening dusk. Yes, he had missed her. She had left him. Such a departure could mean only severance—some deep wound — which it might take long to heal. It would all come right by and by. There could be no such thing as parting between man and wife who loved each other as they loved—who were incapable of falsehood or wrong.

What was this jealous fancy that had taken possession of her? This unappeasable jealousy of the dead past—a passion so strong that it had prompted her to rush away from him in this clandestine fashion, to torture him by all the evidences of an inconsolable grief. His heart was sick to death as he went back to the carriage, helpless to

do anything except go to his deserted home, and see what explanation awaited him there.

It was half-past eight when the carriage drove up to the Manor House. Pamela ran out into the hall to receive him.

“How late you are, uncle!” she cried, “and I can’t find aunt. Everything is at sixes and sevens. The concert was a stupendous success—and—only think!—*I* was encored.”

“Indeed, dear!”

“Yes, my duet with him: and then we sang the other. They would have liked a third, only we pretended not to understand. It would have made all the others so fearfully savage if we had taken it.”

This speech was not a model of lucidity, but it might have been much clearer and yet unintelligible to George Greswold.

“Do you mind dining alone to-night, my dear Pamela?” he said, trying to speak cheerily. “Your aunt is out—and I—I have some letters to write—and I lunched heavily at Salisbury.”

His heavy luncheon had consisted of a biscuit and a glass of beer at the station. His important

business had been a long ramble on Salisbury Plain, alone with his troubled thoughts.

“Did your mistress leave any message for me?” he asked the butler.

“No, sir. Nobody saw my mistress go out. When Louisa went up to dress her for dinner she was gone, sir—but Louisa said there was a letter for you on the bedroom mantelpiece. Shall I send for it, sir?”

“No, no—I will go myself. Serve dinner at once. Miss Ransome will dine alone.”

George Greswold went to the bedroom—that fine old room, the real Queen Anne room, with thick walls and deep-set windows, and old window-seats, and capacious recesses on each side of the high oak chimneypiece, and richly - moulded wainscot, and massive panelled doors, a sober eighteenth-century atmosphere in which it is a privilege to exist—a spacious old room, with old Dutch furniture, of the pre-Chippendale era, and early English china, Worcester simulating Oriental, Chelsea striving after Dresden: a glorious old room, solemn and mysterious as a church in the dim light of a pair of wax-

candles which Louisa the maid had lighted on the mantelpiece.

There, between the candles, appeared two letters :
“ George Greswold, Esq.,” “ Miss Ransome.”

The husband's letter was a thick one, and the style of the penmanship showed how the pen had hurried along, driven by the electric forces of excitement and despair :

“ MY BELOVED,—You asked me last night if the photograph which you showed me had anything to do with my fainting-fit. It had everything to do with it. That photograph is a portrait of my unhappy sister, my cruelly-used, unacknowledged sister ; and I, who have been your wife fourteen years, know now that our marriage was against the law of God and man—that I have never been legally your wife—that our union from the first has been an unholy union, and for that unlawful marriage the hand of God has been laid upon us—heavily—heavily—in chastisement, and the darling of our hearts has been taken from us.

“ ‘ Whom He loveth He chasteneth.’ He has

chastened us, George—perhaps to draw us nearer to Him. We were too happy, it may be, in this temporal life—too much absorbed by our own happiness, living in a charmed circle of love and gladness, till that awful chastisement came.

“There is but one course possible to me, my dear and honoured husband, and that course lies in life-long separation. I am running away from my dear home like a criminal, because I am not strong enough to stand face to face with you and tell you what must be. We must do our best to live out our lives asunder, George ; we must never meet again as wedded lovers, such as we have been for fourteen years. God knows, my affection for you has grown and strengthened with every year of union, and yet it seems to me on looking back that my heart went out to you in all the fulness of an infinite love when first we stood, hand clasped in hand, beside the river. If you are angry with me, George—if you harden your heart against me because I do that which I know to be my duty, at least believe that I never loved you better than in this bitter hour of parting. I spent last night in praye_r

and thought. If there were any way of escape—any possibility of living my own old happy life with a clear conscience—I think God would have shown it to me in answer to my prayers; but there was no ray of light, no gleam of hope. Conscience answers sternly and plainly. By the law of God I have never been your wife, and His law commands me to break an unhallowed tie, although my heart may break with it.

“Do you remember your argument with Mr. Cancellor? I never saw you so vehement in any such dispute, and you took the side which I can but think the side of the Evil One. That conversation now seems to me like a strange foreshadowing of sorrow—a lesson meant for my guidance. Little did I then think that this question could ever have any bearing on my own life; but I recall every word now, and I remember how earnestly my old master spoke—how ruthlessly he maintained the right. Can I doubt his wisdom, from whose lips I first learnt the Christian law, and in whom I first saw the true Christian life?

“I have written to Pamela, begging her to stay

with you, to take my place in the household, and to be to you as an adopted daughter. May God be merciful to us both in this heavy trial, George! Be sure He will deal with us mercifully if we do our duty according to the light that is given to us.

“I shall stay to-night in Queen Anne’s Gate with Mrs. Tomkison. Please send Louisa to me to-morrow with luggage for a considerable absence from home. She will know what to bring. You can tell her that I am going abroad for my health. My intention is to go to some small watering-place in Germany, where I can vegetate, away from all beaten tracks, and from the people who know us. You may rely upon me to bear my own burden, and to seek sympathy and consolation from no earthly comforter.

“Do not follow me, George—should your heart urge you to do so. Respect my solemn resolution, the result of many prayers.—Your ever loving

“MILDRED.”

CHAPTER II.

THE SINS OF THE FATHERS.

GEORGE GRESWOLD read his wife's letter a second time with increasing perplexity and trouble of mind. Her sister! What could this mean? She had never told him of the existence of a sister. She had been described by her father, by every one, as an only child. She had inherited the whole of her father's fortune.

“ Her cruelly-used, unacknowledged sister.”

Those words indicated a social mystery, and as he read and re-read those opening lines of his wife's letter he remembered her reticence about that girl-companion from whom she had been parted so early. He remembered her blushing embarrassment when he questioned her about the girl she called Fay.

The girl had been sent to a finishing-school at Brussels, and Mildred had seen her no more.

His first wife had finished her education at

Brussels. She had talked to him often of the fashionable boarding-school in the quaint old street near the Cathedral; and the slights she had endured there from other girls because of her isolation. There was no stint in the expense of her education. She had as many masters as she cared to have. She was as well dressed as the richest of her companions. But she was nobody, and belonged to nobody, could give no account of herself that would satisfy those merciless inquisitors.

His wife, Vivien Faux, the young English lady whom he had met at Florence. She was travelling in the care of an English artist and his wife, who spent their lives on the Continent. She submitted to no authority, had ample means, and was thoroughly independent. She did not get on very well with either the artist or his wife. She had a knack of saying disagreeable things, and a tongue of exceeding bitterness. A difficult subject the painter called her, and imparted to his particular friends in confidence that his wife and Miss Faux were always quarrelling. Vivien Faux, that was the name borne by the girl whom he met nineteen years ago at

an evening-party in Florence ; that was the name of the girl he had married, after briefest acquaintance, knowing no more about her than that she had a fortune of thirty thousand pounds when she came of age, and that the trustee and custodian of that fortune was a lawyer in Lincoln's Inn, who affected no authority over her, and put no difficulties in the way of her marrying.

He remembered now when he first saw Mildred Fausset something in her fresh young beauty, some indefinable peculiarity of expression or contour, had evolved the image of his dead wife, that image which never recurred to him without keenest pain. He remembered how strange that vague, indescribable resemblance had seemed to him, and how he had asked himself if it had any real existence, or were only the outcome of his own troubled mind, reverting involuntarily to an agonising memory.

“ Her face may come back to me in the faces of other women, as it comes back to me in my miserable dreams,” he told himself.

But as the years went by he became convinced that the likeness was not imaginary. There were points

of resemblance—the delicate tracing of the eyebrows, the form of the brow, the way the hair grew above the temples, were curiously alike. He came to accept the likeness as one of those chance resemblances which are common enough in life. It suggested to him nothing more than that.

He went to the library with the letter still in his hand. His lamp was ready lighted, and, the September evening being chilly, there was a wood fire on the low hearth, which gave an air of cheerfulness to the sombre room.

He rang and told the footman to send Mrs. Bell to him.

Bell appeared, erect and severe of aspect as she had been four-and-twenty years before ; neatly dressed in black silk, with braided gray hair, and a white lace cap.

“ Sit down, Mrs. Bell, I have a good many questions to ask you,” said Greswold, motioning her to a chair on the further side of his desk.

He was sitting with his eyes fixed, looking at the spot where Mildred had fallen senseless at his feet. He sat for some moments in a reverie, and then

turned suddenly, unlocked his desk, and took out the photograph which he had shown Mildred last night.

“Did you ever see that face before, Bell?” he asked, handing her the open case.

“Good gracious, sir, yes, indeed, I should think I did! but Miss Fay was younger than that when she came to Parchment Street.”

“Did you see much of her in Parchment Street?”

“Yes, sir, a good deal, and at The Hook, too; a good deal more than I wanted to. I didn’t hold with her being brought into our house, sir.”

“Why not?”

“I didn’t think it was fair to my mistress.”

“But how was it unfair?”

“Well, sir, I don’t wish to say anything against the dead, and Mr. Fausset was a liberal master to me, and I make no doubt that he died a penitent man. He was a regular church-goer, and an upright man in all his ways while I lived with him; but right is right; and I shall always maintain that it was a cruel thing to a young wife like Mrs.

Fausset, who doted on the ground he walked upon, to bring his natural daughter into the house."

"Mrs. Bell, do you know that this is a serious accusation you are bringing against a dead man?" said George Greswold solemnly. "Now, what grounds have you for saying that this girl"—with his hand upon the photograph—"was Mr. Fausset's daughter?"

"What grounds, sir? *I* don't want any grounds. I'm not a lawyer to put things in that way; but I know what I know. First and foremost, she was the image of him; and next, why did he bring her home and want her to be made one of the family, and treated as a sister by Miss Mildred?"

"She may have been the daughter of a friend."

"People don't do that kind of thing—don't run the risk of making a wife miserable to oblige a friend," retorted Bell scornfully. "Besides, I say again, if she wasn't his own flesh and blood, why was she so like him?"

"She may have been the daughter of a near relation."

“He had but one near relation in the world: his only sister, a young lady who was so difficult to please that she refused no end of good offers, and of such a pious turn that she has devoted her life to doing good for the last five-and-twenty years, to my certain knowledge. I hope, sir, you would not insinuate that *she* had a natural daughter?”

“She may have made a secret marriage, perhaps, known only to her brother.”

“She couldn’t have done any such thing without my knowledge, sir. She was a girl at school at the time of Miss Fay’s birth. Don’t mix Miss Fausset up in it, pray, sir.”

“Was it you only who suspected Mr. Fausset to be Miss Fay’s father?”

“Only me, sir? Why, it was everybody: and, what was worst of all, my poor mistress knew it, and fretted over it to her dying day.”

“But you never heard Mr. Fausset acknowledge the parentage?”

“No, sir, not to me; but I have no doubt he acknowledged it to his poor dear lady. He was an affectionate husband, and he must have been very

much wrapped up in that girl, or he wouldn't have made his wife unhappy about her."

With but the slightest encouragement from Mr. Greswold, Bell expatiated on the subject of Fay's residence in the two houses, and the misery she had wrought there. She unconsciously exaggerated the general conviction about the master's relationship to his *protégée*, nor did she hint that it was she who first mooted the notion in the Parchment Street household. She left George Greswold with the belief that this relationship had been known for a fact to a great many people—that the tie between protector and protected was an open secret.

She dwelt much upon the child Mildred's love for the elder girl, which she seemed to think in itself an evidence of their sisterhood. She gave a graphic account of Mildred's illness, and described how Fay had watched beside her bed night after night.

"I saw her sitting there in her nightgown many a time when I went in the middle of the night to see if Mildred was asleep. I never liked Miss Fay, but justice is justice, and I must say, looking back upon all things," said Mrs. Bell, with a virtuous

air, "that there was no deception about her love for Miss Mildred. I may have thought it put on then ; but looking back upon it now, I know that it was real."

"I can quite understand that my wife must have been very fond of such a companion—sister or no sister—but she was so young that no doubt she soon forgot her friend. Memory is not tenacious at seven years old," said Greswold, with an air of quiet thoughtfulness, cutting the leaves of a new book which had lain on his desk, the paper-knife marking the page where he had thrown it down yesterday afternoon.

"Indeed, she didn't forget, sir. You must not judge Miss Mildred by other girls of seven. She was—she was like Miss Lola, sir"—Bell's elderly voice faltered here. "She was all love and thoughtfulness. She doted on Miss Fay, and I never saw such grief as she felt when she came back from the sea-side and found her gone. It was done for the best, and it was the only thing my mistress could do with any regard for her own self-respect ; but even I felt very sorry Miss Fay had been sent away, when I saw what a blow it was to Miss Mildred. She didn't

get over it for years ; and though she was a good and dutiful daughter, I know that she and her mother had words about Miss Fay more than once."

"She was very fond of her, was she?" murmured George Greswold, in an absent way, steadily cutting the leaves of his book. "Very fond of her. And you have no doubt in your own mind, Mrs. Bell, that the two were sisters?"

"Not the least doubt, sir. I never had," answered Bell resolutely.

She waited for him to speak again, but he sat silent, cutting his way slowly through the big volume, without making one jagged edge, so steady was the movement of the hand that grasped the paper-knife. His eyes were bent upon the book ; his face was in shadow.

"Is that all, sir?" Bell asked at last, when she had grown tired of his silence.

"Yes, Mrs. Bell, that will do. Good-night."

When the door closed upon her, he flung the book away from him, sprang to his feet, and began to pace the room, up and down its length of forty feet, from hearth to door.

“Sisters!—and so fond of each other!” he muttered. “My God, this is fatality! In this, as in the death of my child, I am helpless. The wanton neglect of my servants cost me the idol of my heart. It was not my fault—not mine—but I lost her. And now I am again the victim of fatality—blind, impotent—groping in the dark web—caught in the inexorable net.”

He went back to his desk, and re-read Mildred’s letter in the light of the lamp.

“She leaves me because our marriage is unholy in her eyes,” he said to himself. “What will she think when she knows all—as she must know, I suppose, sooner or later? Sooner or later all things are known, says one of the wise ones of the earth. Sooner or later! She is on the track now. Sooner or later she must know—everything.”

He flung himself into a low chair in front of the hearth, and sat with his elbows on his knees staring at the fire.

“If it were that question of legality only,” he said to himself, “if it were a question of Church, law, bigotry, prejudice, I should not fear the issue.

My love for her, and hers for me, ought to be stronger than any such prejudice. It would need but the first sharp pain of severance to bring her back to me, my fond and faithful wife, willing to submit her judgment to mine, willing to believe, as I believe, that such marriages are just and holy, such bonds pure and true, all over the world, even though one country may allow and another disallow, one colony tie the knot and another loosen it. If it were *that* alone which parts us, I should not fear. But it is the past, the spectral past, which rises up to thrust us asunder. Her sister! And they loved each other as David and Jonathan loved, with the love whose inheritance is a life-long regret."

CHAPTER III.

THE VERDICT OF HER CHURCH.

It was nearly eleven o'clock when Mrs. Greswold arrived at Waterloo. There had been half-an-hour's delay at Bishopstoke, where she changed trains, and the journey had seemed interminable to the over-strained brain of that solitary traveller. Never before had she so journeyed, never during the fourteen years of her married life had she sat behind an engine that was carrying her away from her husband. No words could speak that agony of severance, or express the gloom of the future—stretching before her in one dead-level of desolation—which was to be spent away from him.

“If I were a Roman Catholic I would go into a convent to-morrow; I would lock myself for ever from the outer world,” she thought, feeling that the world could be nothing to her without her husband.

And then she began to ponder seriously upon those sisterhoods in which the Anglican Church is now almost as rich as the Roman. She thought of those women with whom she had been occasionally brought in contact, whom she had been able to help sometimes with her purse and with her sympathy, and she knew that when the hour came for her to renounce the world there would be many homes open to receive her, many a good work worthy of her labour.

“I am not like those good women,” she thought; “the prospect seems to me so dreary. I have loved the world too well. I love it still, even after all that I have lost.”

She had telegraphed to her friend Mrs. Tomkison, and that lady was at the terminus, with her neat little brougham, and with an enthusiastic welcome.

“It is so sweet of you to come to me!” she exclaimed; “but I hope it is not any worrying business that has brought you up to town so suddenly — papers to sign, or anything of that kind.”

Mrs. Tomkison was literary and æsthetic, and had the vaguest notions upon all business details. She was an ardent champion of woman's rights, sent Mr. Tomkison off to the City every morning to earn money for her milliners, decorators, fads, and *protégés* of every kind, and reminded him every evening of his intellectual inferiority. She had an idea that women of property were inevitably plundered by their husbands, and that it was one of the conditions of their existence to be wheedled into signing away their fortunes for the benefit of spendthrift partners, she herself being in the impregnable position of never having brought her husband a sixpence.

"No, it is hardly a business matter, Cecilia. I am only in town *en passant*. I am going to my aunt at Brighton to-morrow. I knew you would give me a night's shelter; and it is much nicer to be with you than to go to an hotel."

The fact was, that of two evils Mildred had chosen the lesser. She had shrunk from the idea of meeting her lively friend, and being subjected to the ordeal of that lady's curiosity; but it had seemed

still more terrible to her to enter a strange hotel at night, and alone. She who had never travelled alone, who had been so closely guarded by a husband's thoughtful love, felt herself helpless as a child in that beginning of widowhood.

"I should have thought it simply detestable of you if you had gone to an hotel," protested Cecilia, who affected strong language. "We can have a delicious hour of confidential talk. I sent Adam to bed before I came out. He is an excellent devoted creature—has just made what *he* calls a pot of money on Mexican Street Railways; but he is a dreadful bore when one wants to be alone with one's dearest friend. I have ordered a cosy little supper—a few natives, only just in, a brace of grouse, and a bottle of the only champagne which smart people will hear of nowadays."

"I am so sorry you troubled about supper," said Mildred, not at all curious about the latest fashion in champagne. "I could not take anything, unless it were a cup of tea."

"But you must have dined early, or hurriedly, at any rate. I hate that kind of dinner—everything

huddled over—and the carriage announced before the *pièce de résistance*. And so you're going to your aunt. Is she ill? Has she sent for you at a moment's notice? You will come into all her money, no doubt; and I am told she is immensely rich."

"I have never thought about her money."

"I suppose not, you lucky creature. It will be sending coals to Newcastle in your case. Your father left you so rich. I am told Miss Fausset gives no end of money to her church people. She has put in two painted windows at St. Edmund's: a magnificent rose window over the porch, and a window in the south transept by Burne Jones—a delicious design—St. Cecilia sitting at an organ, with a cloud of cherubs. By the bye, talking of St. Cecilia, how did you like my friend Castellani? He wrote me a dear little note of gratitude for my introduction, so I am sure you were very good to him."

"I could not dishonour any introduction of yours; besides, Mr. Castellani's grandfather and my

father had been friends. That was a link. He was very obliging in helping us with an amateur concert."

"How do you like him? But here we are at home. You shall tell me more while we are at supper."

Mildred had to sit down to the oysters and grouse, whether she would or not. The dining-room was charming in the day-time, with its view of the Park. At night it might have been a room excavated from Vesuvian lava, so strictly classic were its terra-cotta draperies, its butter-boat lamps, and curule chairs.

"How sad to see you unable to eat anything!" protested Mrs. Tomkison, snapping up the natives with gusto; for it may be observed that the people who wait up for travellers, or for friends coming home from the play, are always hungrier than those who so return. "You shall have your tea directly."

Mildred had eaten nothing since her apology for a breakfast. She was faint with fasting, but had no appetite, and the odour of grouse, fried bread-crumbs, and gravy sickened her. She withdrew to a chair by the fire, and had a dainty little tea-table placed

at her side, while Mrs. Tomkison demolished one of the birds, talking all the time.

"Isn't he a gifted creature?" she asked, helping herself to the second half of the bird.

Mildred almost thought she was speaking of the grouse.

"I mean Castellani," said Cecilia, in answer to her interrogative look. "Isn't he a heap of talent? You heard him play, of course, and you heard his divine voice? When I think of his genius for music, and remember that he wrote *that* book, I am actually wonderstruck."

"The book is clever, no doubt," answered Mildred thoughtfully, "almost too clever to be quite sincere. And as for genius—well, I suppose his musical talent does almost reach genius; and yet what more can one say of Mozart, Beethoven, or Chopin? I think genius is too large a word for any one less than they."

"But I say he is a genius," cried Mrs. Tomkison, elated by grouse and dry sherry (the champagne had been put aside when Mildred refused it). "Does he not carry one out of oneself by his playing? Does

not his singing open the floodgates of our hard, battered old hearts? No one ever interested me so much."

"Have you known him long?"

"For the last three seasons. He is with me three or four times a week when he is in town. He is like a son of the house."

"And does Mr. Tomkison like him?"

"O, you know Adam," said Cecilia, with an expressive shrug. "You know Adam's way. *He* doesn't mind. 'You always must have somebody hanging about you,' he said, 'so you may as well have that French fool as any one else.' Adam calls all foreigners Frenchmen, if they are not obtrusively German. Castellani has been devoted to me; and I daresay I may have got myself talked about on his account," pursued Cecilia, with the pious resignation of a blameless matron of five-and-forty, who rather likes to be suspected of an intrigue; "but I can't help *that*. He is one of the few young men I have ever met who understands me. And then we are such near neighbours, and it is easy for him to run in at any hour. 'You ought to give him a

latchkey,' says Adam; 'it would save the servants a lot of trouble.'"

"Yes, I remember; he lives in Queen Anne's Mansions," Mildred answered listlessly.

"He has a suite of rooms near the top, looking over half London, and exquisitely furnished. He gives afternoon tea to a few chosen friends who don't mind the lift; and we have had a Materialisation in his rooms, but it wasn't a particularly good one," added Mrs. Tomkison, as if she were talking of something to eat.

The maid Louisa arrived at Queen Anne's Gate a little before luncheon on the following day. She brought a considerable portion of Mrs. Greswold's belongings in two large basket-trunks, a portmanteau, and a dressing-bag. These were at once sent on to Victoria in the cab that had brought the young person and the luggage from Waterloo, while the young person herself was accommodated with dinner, table-beer, and gossip in the housekeeper's room. She also brought a letter for her mistress, a letter written by George Greswold late on the night before.

Mildred could hardly tear open the envelope for the trembling of her hands. How would he write to her? Would he plead against her decision? would he try to make her waver? would he set love against law, in such irresistible words as love alone can use? She knew her own weakness and his strength, and she opened his letter full of fear for her own resolution: but there was no passionate pleading.

The letter was measured almost to coldness:

“I need not say that your departure, together with your explanation of that departure, has come upon me as a crushing blow. Your reasons in your own mind are doubtless unanswerable. I cannot even endeavour to gainsay them. I could only seem to you as a special pleader, making the worse appear the better reason, for my own selfish ends. You know my opinion upon this hard-fought question of marriage with a deceased wife’s sister; and you knew how widely it differs from Mr. Cancellor’s view and yours—which, to my mind, is the view of the bigot, and not the Christian. There is no word

in Christ's teaching to forbid such marriages. Your friend and master, Clement Cancellor, is of the school which sets the law-making of a mediæval Church above the wisdom of Christ. Am I to lose my wife because Mr. Cancellor is a better Christian than his Master?

“But granted that you are fixed in this way of thinking, that you deem it your duty to break your husband's heart, and make his home desolate, rather than tolerate the idea of union with one who was once married to your half-sister, let me ask you at least to consider whether you have sufficient ground for believing that my first wife was verily your father's daughter. In the first place, your only evidence of the identity between my wife and the girl you call Fay consists of a photograph which bears a striking likeness to the girl you knew, a likeness which I am bound to say Bell saw as instantly as you yourself had seen it. Remember, that the strongest resemblances have been found between those who were of no kin to each other; and that more than one judicial murder has been committed on the strength of just such a likeness.

“The main point at issue, however, is not so

much the question of identity as the question whether the girl Fay was actually your father's daughter ; and from my interrogation of Bell, it appears to me that the evidence against your father in this matter is one of impressions only, and, even as circumstantial evidence, too feeble to establish any case against the accused. Is it impossible for a man to be interested in an orphan girl, and to be anxious to establish her in his own home, as a companion for his only child, unless that so-called orphan were his own daughter, the offspring of a hidden intrigue ? There may be stronger evidence as to Fay's parentage than the suspicions of servants or your mother's jealousy ; but as yet I have arrived at none. You possibly may know much more than Bell knows, more than your letter implies. If it is not so, if you are acting on casual suspicions only, I can but say that you are prompt to strike a man whose heart has been sorely tried of late, and who had a special claim upon your tenderness by reason of that recent loss.

“I can write no more, Mildred. My heart is too heavy for many words. I do not reproach you.

I only ask you to consider what you are doing before you make our parting irrevocable. You have entreated me not to follow you, and I will obey you, so far as to give you time for reflection before I force myself upon your presence; but I must see you before you leave England. I ask no answer to this letter until we meet.—Your unhappy husband

“GEORGE GRESWOLD.”

The letter chilled her by its calm logic—its absence of passion. There seemed very little of the lover left in a husband who could so write. His contempt for a law which to her was sacred shocked her almost as if it had been an open declaration of infidelity. His sneer at Clement Cancellor wounded her to the quick.

She answered her husband's letter immediately:

“Alas! my beloved,” she wrote, “my reason for believing Fay to have been my sister is unanswerable. My mother on her death-bed told me of the relationship; told me the sad secret with bitter tears. Her knowledge of that story had cast a

shadow on the latter years of her married life. I had seen her unhappy, without knowing the cause. On her death-bed she confided in me. I was almost a woman then, and old enough to understand what she told me. Women are so jealous where they love, George. I suffered many a sharp pang after my discovery of your previous marriage ; jealous of that unknown rival who had gone before me, little dreaming that fatal marriage was to cancel my own.

“My mother’s evidence is indisputable. She must have have known. As I grew older I saw that there was that in my father’s manner when Fay was mentioned which indicated some painful secret. The time came when I was careful to avoid the slightest allusion to my lost sister ; but in my own mind and in my own heart I cherished her image as the image of a sister.

“I am grieved that you should despise Mr. Cancellor and his opinions. My religious education was derived entirely from him. My father and mother were both careless, though neither was unbelieving. He taught me to care for spiritual things. He taught me to look to a better life than the best we

can lead here ; and in this dark hour I thank and bless him for having so taught me. What should I be now, adrift on a sea of trouble, without the compass of faith ? I will steer by that, George, even though it carry me away from him I shall always devotedly love.—Ever, in severance as in union, your own
MILDRED.”

She had written to Mr. Cancellor early that morning, asking him to call upon her before three o'clock. He was announced a few minutes after she finished her letter, and she went to the drawing-room to receive him.

His rusty black coat and slouched hat, crumpled carelessly in his ungloved hand, looked curiously out of harmony with Mrs. Tomkison's drawing-room, which was the passion of her life, the shrine to which she carried gold and frankincense and myrrh, in the shape of *rose du Barri* and *bleue du Roi* Sèvres, veritable old Sherraton tables and chairs, and commodes and cabinets from the boudoir of Marie Antoinette, a lady who must assuredly have sat at more tables and written at more escritaires than any

other woman in the world. Give her Majesty only five minutes for every table and ten for every *bonheur du jour* attributed to her possession, and her married life must have been a good deal longer than the span which she was granted of joy and grief between the passing of the ring and the fall of the axe.

Unsightly as that dark figure showed amidst the delicate tertiaries of Lyons brocade and the bright colouring of satin-wood tables and Sèvres porcelain, Mr. Cancellor was perfectly at his ease in Mrs. Tomkison's drawing-room. He wasted very few of his hours in such rooms, albeit there were many such in which his presence was courted; but seldom as he appeared amidst such surroundings he was never disconcerted by them. He was not easily impressed by externals. The filth and squalor of a London slum troubled him no more than the artistic intricacies of a West End drawing-room, in which the *culte* of beauty left him no room to put down his hat. It was humanity for which he cared—persons, not things. His soul went straight to the souls he was anxious to save. He was narrow, perhaps; but in

that narrowness there was a concentrative power that could work wonders.

One glance at Mildred's face showed him that she was distressed, and that her trouble was no small thing. He held her hand in his long lean fingers, and looked at her earnestly as he said :

“ You have something to tell me—some sorrow ? ”

“ Yes,” she answered, “ an incurable sorrow.”

She burst into tears, the first she had shed since she left her home, and sobbed passionately for some moments, leaning against the Trianon spinet, raining her tears upon the *Vernis Martin* in a way that would have made Mrs. Tomkison's blood run cold.

“ How weak I am ! ” she said impatiently, as she dried her eyes and choked back her sobs. “ I thought I was accustomed to my sorrow by this time. God knows it is no new thing ! It seems a century old already.”

“ Sit down, and tell me all about it,” said Clement Cancellor quietly, drawing forward a chair for her, and then seating himself by her side. “ I cannot help you till you have told me all your trouble ;

and you know I shall help you if I can. I can sympathise with you, in any case."

"Yes, I am sure of that," she answered sadly; and then, falteringly but clearly, she told him the whole story, from its beginning in the days of her childhood till the end yesterday. She held back nothing, she spared no one. Freely, as to her father confessor, she told all. "I have left him for ever," she concluded. "Have I done right?"

"Yes, you have done right. Anything less than that would have been less than right. If you are sure of your facts as to the relationship—if Mr. Greswold's first wife was your father's daughter—there was no other course open to you. There was no alternative."

"And my marriage is invalid in law?" questioned Mildred.

"I do not think so. Law does not always mean justice. If this young lady was your father's natural daughter she had no status in the eye of the law. She was not your sister—she belonged to no one, in the eye of the law. She had no right to bear your father's name. So, if you accept the civil law

for your guide, you may still be George Greswold's wife—you may ignore the tie between you and his first wife. Legally it has no existence."

Mildred crimsoned, and then grew deadly pale. In the eye of the law her marriage was valid. She was not a dishonoured woman—a wife and no wife. She might still stand by her husband's side—go down to the grave as his companion and sweetheart. They who so short a time ago were wedded lovers might be lovers again, all clouds dispersed, the sunshine of domestic peace upon their pathway—if she were content to be guided by the law.

"Should you think me justified if I were to accept my legal position, and shut my eyes to all the rest?" she asked, knowing but too well what the answer would be.

"Should *I* so think! O Mildred, do you know me so little that you need ask such a question? When have I ever taken the law for my guide? Have I not defied that law when it stood between me and my faith? Am I not ready to defy it again were the choice between conscience and law forced upon me? To my mind your half-sister's position

makes not one jot of difference. She was not the less your sister because of her parent's sin, and your marriage with the man who was her husband is not the less an incestuous marriage."

The word struck Mildred like a whip—stung the wounded heart like the sharp cut of a lash.

"Not one word more," she cried, holding up her hands as if to ward off a blow. "If my union with my—very dear—husband was a sinful union, I was an unconscious sinner. The bond is broken for ever. I shall sin no more."

Her tears came again; but this time they gathered slowly on the heavy lids, and rolled slowly down the pale cheeks, while she sat with her eyes fixed, looking straight before her, in dumb despair.

"Be sure all will be well with you if you cleave to the right," said the priest, with grave tenderness, feeling for her as acutely as an ascetic can feel for the grief that springs from earthly passions and temporal loves, sympathising as a mother sympathises with a child that sobs over a broken toy. The toy is a futile thing, but to the child priceless.

"What are you going to do with your life?" he

asked gently, after a long pause, in which he had given her time to recover her self-possession.

"I hardly know. I shall go to the Tyrol next month, I think, and choose some out-of-the-way nook, where I can live quietly; and then for the winter I may go to Italy or the south of France. A year hence perhaps I may enter a sisterhood; but I do not want to take such a step hurriedly."

"No, not hurriedly," said Mr. Cancellor, his face lighting up suddenly as that pale, thin, irregular-featured face could lighten with the divine radiance from within; "not hurriedly, not too soon; but I feel assured that it would be a good thing for you to do—the sovereign cure for a broken life. You think now that happiness would be impossible for you, anywhere, anyhow. Believe me, my dear Mildred, you would find it in doing good to others. A vulgar remedy, an old woman's recipe, perhaps, but infallible. A life lived for the good of others is always a happy life. You know the glory of the sky at sunset—there is nothing like it, no such splendour, no such beauty—and yet it is only a reflected light. So it is with the human heart, Mildred.

The sun of individual love has sunk below life's horizon, but the reflected glory of the Christian's love for sinners brightens that horizon with a far lovelier light."

"If I could feel like you ; if I were as unselfish as you—" faltered Mildred.

" You have seen Louise Hillersdon—a frivolous, pleasure-loving woman, you think, perhaps ; one who was once an abject sinner, whom you are tempted to despise. I have seen that woman kneeling by the bed of death ; I have seen her ministering with unflinching courage to the sufferers from the most loathsome diseases humanity knows ; and I firmly believe that those hours of unselfish love have been the brightest spots in her chequered life. Believe me, Mildred, self-sacrifice is the shortest road to happiness. No, I would not urge you to make your election hurriedly. Give yourself leisure for thought and prayer, and then, if you decide on devoting your life to good works, command my help, my counsel—all that is mine to give."

"I know, I know that I have a sure friend in you, and that under heaven I have no better friend,"

she answered quietly, glancing at the clock as she spoke. "I am going to Brighton this afternoon, to spend a few days with my aunt, and to—tell her what has happened. She must know all about Fay. If there is any room for doubt she will tell me. My last hope is there."

CHAPTER IV.

NO LIGHT.

MISS FAUSSET—Gertrude Fausset—occupied a large house in Lewes Crescent—with windows commanding all that there is of bold coast-line and open sea within sight of Brighton. Her windows looked eastward, and her large substantial mansion turned its back upon all the frivolities of the popular watering-place—upon its Cockney visitors of summer and its November smartness, its aquarium and theatre, its London stars and Pavilion concerts, its carriages and horsemen—few of whom ever went so far east as Lewes Crescent; its brazen bands and brazen faces—upon everything except its church bells, which were borne up to Miss Fausset's windows by every west wind, and which sounded with but little intermission from no less than three tabernacles within half a mile of the crescent.

Happily Miss Fausset loved the sound of church

bells, loved all things connected with her own particular church with the ardour which a woman who has few ties of kindred or friendship can afford to give to clerical matters. Nothing except serious indisposition would have prevented her attending matins at St. Edmund's, the picturesque and semi-fashionable Gothic temple in a narrow side street within ten minutes' walk of her house ; nor was she often absent from afternoon prayers, which were read daily at five o'clock to a small and select congregation. The somewhat stately figure of the elderly spinster was familiar to most of the worshippers at St. Edmund's. All old Brightonians knew the history of that tall, slim maiden lady, richly clad after a style of her own, which succeeded in reconciling Puritanism with the fashion of the day ; very dignified in her carriage and manners, with a touch of hauteur, as of a miserable sinner who knew that she belonged to the salt of the earth. Brightonians knew that she was Miss Fausset, sole survivor of the great house of Fausset & Company, silk merchants and manufacturers, St. Paul's Churchyard and Lyons ; that she had inherited a handsome fortune

from her father before she was twenty, that she had refused a good many advantageous offers, had ranked as a beauty, and had been much admired in her time, that she had occupied the house in Lewes Crescent for more than a quarter of a century, and that she had taken a prominent part in philanthropic associations and clerical matters during the greater number of those years. No charity bazaar was considered in the way of success until Miss Fausset had promised to hold a stall; no new light in the ecclesiastical firmament of Brighton ranked as a veritable star until Miss Fausset had taken notice of him. She received everybody connected with Church and charitable matters. Afternoon tea in her drawing-room was a social distinction, and strangers were taken to her as to a Royal personage. Her occasional dinners—very rare, and never large—were talked of as perfection in the way of dining.

“It is easy for her to do things well,” sighed an overweighted matron, “with her means, and no family. She must be inordinately rich.”

“Did she come into a very large fortune at her father’s death?”

“O, I believe old Fausset was almost a millionaire, and he had only a son and a daughter. But it is not so much the amount she inherited as the amount she must have saved. Think how she must have nursed her income, with her quiet way of living! Only four indoor servants and a coachman; no garden, and one fat brougham horse. She must be rolling in money.”

“She gives away a great deal.”

“Nothing compared with what other people spend. Money goes a long way in charity. Ten pounds makes a good show on a subscription list; but what is it in a butcher’s book? I daresay my three boys have spent as much at Oxford in the last six years as Miss Fausset has given in charity within the same time; and *we* are poor people.”

It pleased Miss Fausset to live quietly, and to spend very little money upon splendours of any kind. There was distinction enough for her in the intellectual ascendancy she had acquired among those church-going Brightonians who thought exactly as she thought. Her spacious, well-appointed house; her experienced servants—cook, housemaid, lady’s-

maid, and butler; her neat little brougham and perfect brougham horse realised all her desires in the way of luxury. Her own diet was of an almost ascetic simplicity, and her servants were on board-wages; but she gave her visitors the best that the season or the fashion could suggest to an experienced cook. Even her afternoon tea was considered superior to everybody else's tea, and her table was provided with daintier cakes and biscuits than were to be seen elsewhere.

Her house had been decorated and furnished under her own direction, and was marked in all particulars by that grain of Puritanism which was noticeable in the lady's attire. The carpets and curtains in the two drawing-rooms were silver-gray; the furniture was French, and belonged to the period of the Directory, when the graceful lightness of the Louis Seize style was merging into the classicism of the Empire. In Miss Fausset's drawing-room there were none of those charming futilities which cumber the tables of more frivolous women. Here Mr. Cancellor would have found room, and to spare, for his hat—room for a com-

mittee meeting, or a mission service, indeed—on that ample expanse of silvery velvet pile, a small arabesque pattern in different shades of gray.

The grand piano was the principal feature of the larger room, but it was not draped or disguised, sophisticated by flower-vases, or made glorious with plush, after the manner of fashionable pianos. It stood forth—a concert grand, in unsophisticated bulk of richly carved rosewood, a Broadwood piano, and nothing more. The inner room was lined with bookshelves, and had the air of a room that was meant for usefulness rather than hospitality. A large, old-fashioned rosewood *secrétaire*, of the Directory period, occupied the space at the side of the wide single window, which commanded a view of dead walls covered with Virginia creeper, and in the distance a glimpse of the crocketed spire of St. Edmund's, a reproduction in little of one of the turrets of the Sainte Chapelle.

Two-thirds of the volumes in those tall bookcases were of a theological character; the remaining third consisted of those standard works which everybody

likes to possess, but which only the superior few care to read.

Mildred had telegraphed in the morning to announce her visit, and she found her aunt's confidential man-servant, a German Swiss, and her aunt's neat little brougham waiting for her at the station. Miss Fausset herself was in the inner drawing-room ready to receive her.

There was something in the chastened colouring and perfect order of that house in Lewes Crescent which always chilled Mildred upon entering it after a long interval. It was more than three years since she had visited her aunt, and this afternoon in the fading light the silver-gray drawing-rooms looked colder and emptier than usual.

Miss Fausset rose to welcome her niece, and imprinted a stately kiss on each cheek.

"My dear Mildred, you have given me a very agreeable surprise," she said; "but I hope it is no family trouble that has brought you to me—so suddenly."

She looked at her niece searchingly with her cold gray eyes. She was a handsome woman still,

at fifty-seven years of age. Her features were faultless, and the oval of her face was nearly as perfect as it had been at seven-and-twenty. Her abundant hair was silvery gray, and worn *à la* Marie Antoinette, a style which lent dignity to her appearance. Her dinner-gown of dark gray silk fitted her tall, upright figure to perfection, and her one ornament, an antique diamond cross, half hidden by the folds of her lace fichu, was worthy of the rich Miss Fausset.

“Yes, aunt, it is trouble that has brought me to you—very bitter trouble; but it is just possible that you can help me to conquer it. I have come to you for help, if you can give it.”

“My dear child, you must know I would do anything in my power—” Miss Fausset began, with gentle deliberation.

“Yes, yes, I know,” Mildred answered, almost impatiently. “I know that you will be sorry for me, but you may not be able to do anything. It is a forlorn hope. In such a strait as mine one catches at any hope.”

Her aunt’s measured accents jarred upon her overstrung nerves. Her grief raged within her like

a fever, and the grave placidity of the elder woman tortured her. There seemed no capacity for sympathy in this stately spinster who stood and scanned her with coldly inquisitive eyes.

“Can we be quite alone for a little while, aunt? Are you sure of no one interrupting us while I am telling you my troubles?”

“I will give an order. It is only half-past six, and we do not dine till eight. There is no reason we should be disturbed. Come and sit over here, Mildred, on this sofa. Your maid can take your hat and jacket to your room.”

Stray garments lying about in those orderly drawing-rooms would have been agony to Miss Fausset. She rang the bell, and told the servant to send Mrs. Greswold's maid, and to take particular care that no visitor was admitted.

“I can see nobody this evening,” she said. “If any one calls you will say I have my niece with me, and cannot be disturbed.”

Franz, the Swiss butler, bowed with an air of understanding the finest shades of feeling in that honoured mistress. He brought out a tea-table,

and placed it conveniently near the sofa on which Mildred was sitting, and he placed upon it the neatest of salvers, with tiny silver teapot and Worcester cup and saucer, and bread and butter such as Titania herself might have eaten with an "apricock" or a bunch of dewberries. Then he discreetly retired, and sent Louisa, who smelt of tea and toast already, though she could not have been more than ten minutes in the great stony basement, which would have accommodated a company of infantry just as easily as the spinster's small establishment.

Louisa took the jacket and hat and her mistress's keys, and withdrew to finish her tea and to discuss the motive and meaning of this extraordinary journey from Enderby to Brighton. The gossips over the housekeeper's tea-table inclined to the idea that Mrs. Greswold had found a letter—a compromising letter—addressed to her husband by some lady with whom he had been carrying on an intrigue, in all probability Mrs. Hillersdon of Riverdale.

"We all know who *she* was before Mr. Hillersdon married her," said Louisa; "and don't tell me that a woman who has behaved liked that while she

was young would ever be really prudent. Mrs. Hillersdon must be fifty if she's a day; but she is a handsome woman still, and who knows?—she may have been an old flame of my master's."

"That's it," sighed Franz assentingly. "It's generally an old flame that does the mischief. *Wir sind armer Thieren.*"

"And now, my dear, tell me what has gone wrong with you," said Miss Fausset, seating herself on the capacious sofa—low, broad, luxurious, one of Crunden's masterpieces—beside her niece.

The rooms were growing shadowy. A small fire burned in the bright steel grate, and made the one cheerful spot in the room, touching the rich bindings of the books with gleams of light.

"O, it is a long story, aunt! I must begin at the beginning. I have a question to ask you, and your answer means life or death to me."

"A question—to—ask—me?"

Miss Fausset uttered the words slowly, spacing them out, one by one, in her clear, calm voice—the voice that had spoken at committee meetings, and

had laid down the law in matters charitable and ecclesiastical many times in that good town of Brighton.

“I must go back to my childhood, aunt, in the first place,” began Mildred, in her low, earnest voice, her hands clasped, her eyes fixed upon her aunt’s coldly correct profile, between her and the light of the fire, the wide window behind her, with the day gradually darkening after the autumnal sunset. The three eastward-looking windows in the large room beyond had a ghostly look, with their long guipure curtains closely drawn against the dying light.

“I must go back to the time when I was seven years old, and my dear father,” falteringly, and with tears in her voice, “brought home his adopted daughter, Fay—Fay Fausset, he called her. She was fourteen and I was only seven, but I was very fond of her all the same. We took to each other from the beginning. When we left London and went to The Hook, Fay went with us. I was ill there, and she helped to nurse me. She was very good to me—kinder than I can say, and I loved her

as if she had been my sister. But when I got well she was sent away—sent to a finishing-school at Brussels, and I never saw her again. She had only lived with us one short summer. Yet it seemed as if she and I had been together all my life. I missed her sorely. I missed her for years afterwards.”

“My tender-hearted Mildred!” said Miss Fausset gently. “It was like you to give your love to a stranger, and to be so faithful to her memory!”

“O, but she was not a stranger! she was something nearer and dearer. I could hardly have been so fond of her if there had not been some link between us.”

“Nonsense, Mildred! A warm-hearted child will take to any one near her own age who is kind to her. Why should this girl have been anything more than an orphan, whom your father adopted out of the generosity of his heart?”

“O, she was something more! There was a mystery. Did you ever see her, aunt? I don’t remember your coming to Parchment Street or to The Hook while she was with us.”

“No. I was away from England part of that

year. I spent the autumn at Baden with my friends the Templemores."

"Ah, then you knew nothing of the trouble Fay made in our home—most innocently? It is such a sad story, aunt. I can hardly bear to touch upon it, even to you, for it cast a shadow upon my father's character. You know how I loved and honoured him, and how it must pain me to say one word that reflects upon him."

"Yes, I know you loved him. You could not love him too well, Mildred. He was a good man—a large-hearted, large-minded man."

"And yet that one act of his, bringing poor Fay into his home, brought unhappiness upon us all. My mother seemed set against her from the very first; and on her death-bed she told me that Fay was my father's daughter. She gave me no proof—she told me nothing beyond that one cruel fact. Fay was the offspring of hidden sin. She told me this, and told me to remember it all my life. Do you think, aunt, she was justified in this accusation against my father?"

"How can I tell, Mildred?" Miss Fausset an-

swered coldly. "My brother may have had secrets from me."

"But did you never hear anything—any hint of this mystery? Did you never know anything about your brother's life in the years before his marriage which would serve as a clue? He could hardly have cared for any one—been associated with any one—and you not hear something—"

"If you mean did I ever hear that my brother had a mistress, I can answer no," replied Miss Fausset, in a very unsympathetic voice. "But men do not usually allow such things to be known to their sisters, especially to a younger sister, as I was by a good many years. He may have been—like other men. Few of them seem free from the stain of sin. But however that may have been, I know nothing about the matter."

"And you do not know the secret of Fay's parentage—you, my father's only sister—his only surviving relation. Can you help me to find any one who knew more about his youth—any confidential friend—any one who can tell me whether that girl was really my sister?"

"No, Mildred. I have no knowledge of your father's friends. They are all dead and gone, perhaps. But what can it matter to you who this girl was? She is dead. Let the secret of her existence die with her. It is wisest, most charitable to do so."

"Ah, you know she is dead!" cried Mildred quickly. "Where and when did she die? How did you hear of her?"

"From your father. She died abroad. I do not remember the year."

"Was it before my marriage?"

"Yes, I believe so."

"Long before?"

"Two or three years, perhaps. I cannot tell you anything precisely. The matter was of no moment to me."

"O aunt, it is life and death to *me*. She was my husband's first wife. She and I—daughters of one father—as I, alas! can but believe we were—married the same man."

"I never heard your husband was a widower."

"No, nor did I know it until a few weeks ago;" and then, as clearly as her distress of mind would

allow, Mildred told how the discovery had been made.

“The evidence of a photograph—which may be a good or a bad likeness—is a small thing to go upon, Mildred,” said her aunt. “I think you have been very foolish to make up your mind upon such evidence.”

“O, but there are other facts—coincidences! And nothing would make me doubt the identity of the original of that photograph with Fay Fausset. I recognised it at the first glance; and Bell, who saw it afterwards, knew the face immediately. There could be no error in that. The only question is about her parentage. I thought, if there were room for doubt in the face of my mother’s death-bed statement, you could help me. But it is all over. You were my last hope,” said Mildred despairingly.

She let her face sink forward upon her clasped hands. Only in this moment did she know how she had clung to the hope that her aunt would be able to assure her she was mistaken in her theory of Fay’s parentage.

“My dear Mildred,” began Miss Fausset, after

a pause, "the words you have just used—'death-bed statement'—seem to mean something very solemn, indisputable, irrevocable; but I must beg you to remember that your poor mother was a very weak woman and a very exacting wife. She was offended with my brother for his adoption of an orphan girl. I have heard her hold forth about her wrongs many a time, vaguely, not daring to accuse him before me; but still I could understand the drift of her thoughts. She may have nursed these vague suspicions of hers until they seemed to her like positive facts; and on her death-bed, her brain enfeebled by illness, she may have made direct assertions upon no other ground than those long-cherished suspicions and the silent jealousies of years. I do not think, Mildred, you ought to take any decisive step upon the evidence of your mother's jealousy."

"My mother spoke with conviction. She must have known something—she must have had some proof. But even if it were possible she could have spoken so positively without any other ground than jealous feeling, there are other facts that cry aloud to me, evidences to which I dare not shut my eyes.

Fay must have belonged to some one, aunt," pursued Mildred, with growing earnestness, clasping her hands upon Miss Fausset's arm as they sat side by side in the gathering darkness. "There must have been some reason—and a strong one—for her presence in our house. My father was not a man to act upon caprice. I never remember any foolish or frivolous act of his in all the years of my girlhood. He was a man of thought and purpose; he did nothing without a motive. He would not have charged himself with the care of that poor girl unless he had considered it his duty to protect her."

"Perhaps not."

"I am sure not. Then comes the question, who was she if she was not my father's daughter? He had no near relations, he had no bosom friend that I ever heard of—no friend so dear that he would deem it his duty to adopt that friend's orphan child. There is no other clue to the mystery that I can imagine. Can you, aunt, suggest any other solution?"

"No, Mildred, I cannot."

"If there were no other evidence within my

knowledge, my father's manner alone would have given me a clue to his secret. He so studiously evaded my inquiries about Fay—there was such a settled melancholy in his manner when he spoke of her.”

“Poor John! he had a heart of gold, Mildred. There never was a truer man than your father. Be sure of that, come what may.”

“I have never doubted that.”

There was a pause of some minutes after this. The two women sat in silence looking at the fire, which had burned red and hollow since Franz had last attended to it. Mildred sat with her head leaning against her aunt's shoulder, her hand clasping her aunt's hand. Miss Fausset sat erect as a dart, looking steadily at the fire, her lips compressed and resolute, the image of unfaltering purpose.

“And now, Mildred,” she began at last, in those measured accents which Mildred remembered in her childhood as an association of awe, “take an old woman's advice, and profit by an old woman's experience of life if you can. Put this suspicion of yours on one side—forget it as if it had never been, and

go back to your good and faithful husband. This suspicion of yours is but a suspicion at most, founded on the jealous fancy of one of the most fanciful women I ever knew. Why should George Greswold's life be made desolate because your mother was a bundle of nerves? Forget all you have ever thought about that orphan girl, and go back to your duty as a wife."

Mildred started away from her aunt, and left the sofa as if she had suddenly discovered herself in contact with the Evil One.

"Aunt, you astound, you horrify me!" she exclaimed. "Can *you* be so false to the conduct and principles of your whole life—can *you* put duty to a husband before duty to God? Have I not sworn to honour Him with all my heart, with all my strength; and am I to yield to the weak counsel of my heart, which would put my love of the creature above my honour of the Creator? Would you counsel me to persist in an unholy union—you whose life has been given up to the service of God—you who have put His service far above all earthly affections; you who have shown yourself so strong: can you counsel me

to be so weak : and to let my love—my fond true love for my dear one—conquer my knowledge of the right? Who knows if my darling's death may not have been God's judgment upon iniquity—God's judgment—”

She had burst into sudden tears at the mention of her husband's name, with all that tenderness his image evolved ; but at that word judgment she stopped abruptly with a half-hysterical cry, as a vision of the past flashed into her mind.

She remembered the afternoon of the return to Enderby, and how her husband had knelt by his daughter's grave, believing himself alone, and how there had come up from that prostrate figure a bitter cry :

“ Judgment ! judgment ! ”

Did he know ? Was that the remorseful ejaculation of one who knew himself a deliberate sinner ?

Miss Fausset endured this storm of reproof without a word. She never altered her attitude, or wavered in her quiet contemplation of the fading fire. She waited while Mildred paced up and down the room in a tempest of passionate feeling, and

then she said, even more quietly than she had spoken before,

“ My dear Mildred, I have given you my advice, conscientiously. If you refuse to be guided by the wisdom of one who is your senior by a quarter of a century, the consequences of your obstinacy must be upon your own head. I only know that if *I* had as good a man as George Greswold for my husband ”— with a little catch in her voice that sounded almost like a sob—“ it would take a great deal more than a suspicion to part me from him. And now, Mildred, if you mean to dress for dinner, it is time you went to your room.”

In any other house, and with any other hostess, Mildred would have asked to be excused from sitting down to a formal dinner, and to spend the rest of the evening in her own room ; but she knew her aunt's dislike of any domestic irregularity, so she went away meekly, and put on the black lace gown which Louisa had laid out for her, and returned to the drawing-room at five minutes before eight.

She had been absent half an hour, but it seemed to her as if Miss Fausset had not stirred since she

left her. The lamps were lighted, the fire had been made up, and the silver-gray brocade curtains were drawn; but the mistress of the house was sitting in exactly the same attitude on the sofa near the fire, erect, motionless, with her thoughtful gaze fixed upon the burning coals in the bright steel grate.

Aunt and niece dined *tête-à-tête*, ministered to by the experienced Franz, who was thorough master of his calling. All the details of that quiet dinner were of an elegant simplicity, but everything was perfect after its fashion, from the soup to the dessert, from the Irish damask to the old English silver—everything such as befitted the station of a lady who was often spoken of as the rich Miss Fausset.

The evening passed in mournful quiet. Mildred played two of Mozart's sonatas at her aunt's request—sonatas which she had played in her girlhood before the advent of her first and only lover, the lover who was now left widowed and desolate in that time which should have been the golden afternoon of life. As her fingers played those familiar movements, her mind was at Enderby with the husband she had deserted. How was he bearing his soli-

tude? Would he shut his heart against her in anger, teach himself to live without her? She pictured him in his accustomed corner of the drawing-room, with his lamp-lit table, and pile of books and papers, and Pamela seated on the other side of the room, and the dogs lying on the hearth, and the room all aglow with flowers in the subdued light of the shaded lamps; so different from these colourless rooms of Miss Fausset's, with their look as of vaulted halls, in which voices echo with hollow reverberations amidst empty space.

And then she thought of her own desolate life, and wondered what it was to be. She felt as if she had no strength of mind to chalk out a path for herself—to create for herself a mission. That sublime idea of living for others, of a life devoted to finding the lost ones of Israel—or nursing the sick—or teaching children the way of righteousness—left her cold. Her thoughts dwelt persistently upon her own loves, her own losses, her own ideal of happiness.

“I am of the earth earthy,” she thought despairingly, as her fingers lingered over a slow

movement. "If I were like Clement Cancellor, my own individual sorrow would seem as nothing compared with that vast sum of human suffering which he is always trying to lessen."

"May I ask what your plans are for the future, Mildred?" said Miss Fausset, laying aside a memoir of Bishop Selwyn, which she had been reading while her niece played. "I need hardly tell you that I shall be pleased to have you here as long as you care to stay; but I should like to know your scheme of life—in the event of your persistence in a separation from your husband."

"I have made no definite plan, aunt; I shall spend the autumn in some quiet watering-place in Germany, and perhaps go to Italy for the winter."

"Why to Italy?"

"It is the dream of my life to see that country, and my husband always refused to take me there."

"For some good reason, no doubt."

"I believe he had a dread of fever. I know of no other reason."

"You are prompt to take advantage of your independence."

“Indeed, aunt, I have no idea of that kind. God help me ! my independence is a sorry privilege. But if any country could help me to forget my sorrows, that country would be Italy.”

“And after the winter ? Do you mean to live abroad altogether ?”

“I don’t know what I may do. I have thoughts of entering a sisterhood by and by.”

“Well, you must follow your own course, Mildred. I can say no more than I have said already. If you make up your mind to renounce the world there are sisterhoods all over England, and there is plenty of good work to be done. Perhaps after all it is the best life, and that those are happiest who shut their minds against earthly affections.”

“As you have done, aunt,” said Mildred, with respect. “I know how full of good works your life has been.”

“I have tried to do my duty according to my lights,” answered the spinster gravely.

The next day was cold and stormy, autumn with a foretaste of winter. Mildred went to the morning

service with her aunt, in the bright new Gothic church which Miss Fausset's liberality had helped to create: a picturesque temple with clustered columns and richly floriated capitals, diapered roof, and encaustic pavement, and over all things the glow of many-coloured lights from painted windows. Miss Fausset spent the morning in visiting among the poor. She had a large district out in the London Road, in a part of Brighton of which the fashionable Brightonian hardly knoweth the existence.

Mildred sat in the back drawing-room all the morning, pretending to read. She took volume after volume out of the bookcase, turned over the leaves, or sat staring at a page for a quarter of an hour at a time, in hopeless vacuity of mind. She had brooded upon her trouble until her brain seemed benumbed, and nothing was left of that sharp sorrow but a dull aching pain.

After luncheon she went out for a solitary walk on the cliff-road that leads eastward. It was a relief to find herself alone upon that barren down, with the great stormy sea in front of her, and the

busy world left behind. She walked all the way to Rottingdean, rejoicing in her solitude, dreading the return to the stately silver-gray drawing-room and her aunt's society. Looking down at the village nestling in the hollow of the hills, it seemed to her that she might hide her sorrows almost as well in that quiet nook as in the remotest valley in Europe; and it seemed to her also that this place of all others was best fitted for the establishment of any charitable foundation in a small way—for a home for the aged poor, for instance, or for orphan children. Her own fortune would amply suffice for any such modest foundation. The means were at her disposal. Only the will was wanting.

It was growing dusk when she went back to Lewes Crescent, so she went straight to her room and dressed for dinner before going to the drawing-room. The wind, with its odour of the sea, had refreshed her. She felt less depressed, better able to face a life-long sorrow, than before she went out, but physically she was exhausted by the six-mile walk, and she looked pale as ashes in her black gown, with its evening bodice, showing the

alabaster throat and a large black enamel locket set with a monogram in diamonds—L. G., Laura Greswold.

She entered the inner room. Her aunt was not there, and there was only one large reading-lamp burning on a table near the fire. The front drawing-room was in shadow. She went towards the piano, intending to play to herself in the twilight, but as she moved slowly in the direction of the instrument a strong hand played the closing bars of a fugue by Sebastian Bach, a chain of solemn chords that faded slowly into silence.

The hands that played those chords were the hands of a master. It was hardly a surprise to Mildred when a tall figure rose from the piano, and César Castellani stood before her in the dim light.

His hat and gloves were upon the piano, as if he had just entered the room.

"My dear Mrs. Greswold, how delightful to find you here! I came to make a late call upon your aunt—she is always indulgent to my Bohemian indifference to etiquette—and had not the least idea that I should see you."

“I did not know that you and my aunt were friends.”

“No?” interrogatively. “That is very odd, for we are quite old friends. Miss Fausset was all goodness to me when I was an idle undergraduate.”

“Yet when you came to Enderby you brought an introduction from Mrs. Tomkison. Surely my aunt would have been a better person—”

“No doubt; but it is just like me to take the first sponsor who came to hand. When I am in London I half live at Mrs. Tomkison’s, and I had heard her rave about you until I became feverishly anxious to make your acquaintance. I ought perhaps to have referred to Miss Fausset for my credentials—but I am *volage* by nature: and then I knew Mrs. Tomkison would exaggerate my virtues and ignore my errors.”

Mildred went back to the inner room, and seated herself by the reading-lamp. Castellani followed her, and placed himself on the other side of the small octagon table, leaving only a narrow space between them.

"How pale you are!" he said, with a look of concern. "I hope you are not ill?"

"No, I am only tired after a long walk."

"I had no idea you had left Enderby."

"Indeed!"

"You said nothing of your intention of leaving the neighbourhood the day before yesterday."

"There was no occasion to talk of my plans," Mildred answered coldly. "We were all too anxious about the concert to think of any other matter."

"Did you leave soon after the concert?"

"The same evening. I did not know you were leaving Riverdale."

"O, I only only stayed for the concert. I had protracted my visit unconscionably, but Mrs. Hillersdon was good enough not to seem tired of me. I am in nobody's way, and I contrived to please her with my music. Did you not find her delightfully artistic?"

"I thought her manners charming; and she seems fond of music, if that is what you mean by being artistic."

“O, I mean worlds more than that. Mrs. Hillersdon is artistic to her fingers’ ends. In everything she does one feels the artist. Her dress, her air, her way of ordering a dinner or arranging a room—her feeling for literature—she seldom reads—her feeling for form and colour—she cannot draw a line—her personality is the very essence of modern art. She is as a woman what Ruskin is as a man. Is Miss Ransome with you?”

“No, I have left her to keep house for me.”

It seemed a futile thing to make believe that all was well at Enderby, to ward off explanations, when before long the world must know that George Greswold and his wife were parted for ever. Some reason would have to be given. That thirst for information about the inner life of one’s neighbours which is the ruling passion of this waning century must be slaked somehow. It was partly on this account, perhaps, that Mildred fancied it would be a good thing for her to enter a Sisterhood. The curious could be satisfied then. It would be said that Mrs. Greswold had given up the world.

“She is a very sweet girl,” said Castellani

thoughtfully; "pretty too, a delicious complexion, hair that suggests Sabrina after a visit from the hairdresser, a delightful figure, and very nice manners—but she leaves me as cold as ice. Why is it that only a few women in the world have magnetic power? They are so few, and their influence is so stupendous. Think of the multitude of women of all nations, colours, and languages that go to make up one Cleopatra or one Mary Stuart."

Miss Fausset came into the room while he was talking, and was surprised at seeing him in such earnest conversation with her niece.

"One would suppose you had known each other for years," she said, as she shook hands with Castellani, looking from one to the other.

"And so we have," he answered gaily. "In some lives weeks mean years. I sometimes catch myself wondering what the world was like before I knew Mrs. Greswold."

"How long have you known her — without rodomontade?"

"For about a month, aunt," replied Mildred. "I have been asking Mr. Castellani why he came

to me with an introduction from my friend Mrs. Tomkison, when it would have been more natural to present himself as a friend of yours."

"O, he has always a motive for what he does," Miss Fausset said coldly. "You will stay to dinner, of course?" she added to Castellani.

"I am free for this evening, and I should like to stay, if you can forgive my morning coat."

"I am used to irregularities from you. Give Mrs. Greswold your arm."

Franz was at the door, announcing the evening meal, and presently Mildred found herself seated at the small round table in the sombre spacious dining-room—a room with a bayed front, commanding an illimitable extent of sea—with César Castellani sitting opposite her. The meal was livelier than the dinner of last night. Castellani appeared unconscious that Mildred was out of spirits. He was full of life and gaiety, and had an air of happiness which was almost contagious. His conversation was purely intellectual, ranging through the world of mind and of fancy, scarcely touching things earthly and human; and thus he struck no jarring chord in

Mildred's weary heart. So far as she could be distracted from the ever-present thought of loss and sorrow, his conversation served to distract her.

He went up to the drawing-room with the two ladies, and at Miss Fausset's request sat down to the piano. The larger room was still in shadow, the smaller bright with fire and lamplight.

He played as only the gifted few can play—played as one in whom music is a sixth sense, but to-night his music was new to Mildred. He played none of those classic numbers which had been familiar to her ever since she had known what music meant. His muse to-night was full of airy caprices, quips and cranks and wreathed smiles. It was operatic music, of the stage stagey; a music which seemed on a level with Watteau or Tissot in the sister art—gay to audacity, and sentimental to affectation. It was charming music all the same—charged with melody, gracious, complacent, uncertain, like an April day.

Whatever it was, every movement was familiar to Gertrude Fausset. She sat with her long ivory knitting-needles at rest on her lap—sat in a dreamy attitude, gazing at the fire and listening intently.

Some melodies seemed to touch her almost to tears. The love of music ran in the Fausset family, and it was no surprise to Mildred to see her aunt so absorbed. What had an elderly spinster to live for if it were not philanthropy and art? And for the plastic arts—for pictures and porcelain, statuary or high-art furniture—Miss Fausset cared not a jot, as those barren drawing-rooms, with their empty walls and pallid colour, bore witness. Music she loved with unaffected devotion, and it was in nowise strange to find her the friend and patroness of César Castellani, opposite as were the opinions of the man who wrote *Nepenthe* and the woman who had helped to found the church of St. Edmund the Confessor.

“Play the duet at the end of the second act,” she said, when he paused after a brilliant six-eight movement which suggested a joyous chorus.

He played a cantabile accompaniment, like the flow of summer seas, and then a plaintive melody for two voices—following, answering, echoing each other with tearful emphasis—a broken phrase here and there, as if the singer were choked by a despairing sob.

“What is the name of the opera, aunt?” asked Mildred; “I never heard any of that music before.”

“He has been playing selections from different operas. That last melody is a duet in an opera called *La Donna del Pittore*.”

“By what composer? It sounded like Flotow.”

“It is not Flotow’s. That opera was written by Mr. Castellani’s father.”

“I remember he told me his father had written operas. It is a pity his music was never known in England.”

“You had better say it was a pity his music was never fashionable in Paris. Had it been recognised there, English connoisseurs would have speedily discovered its merits. We are not a musical nation, Mildred. We find new planets, but we never discover new musicians. We took up Weber only to neglect him and break his heart. We had not taste enough to understand Mendelssohn’s *Melusine*.”

“Mr. Castellani’s operas were popular in Italy, were they not?”

“For a time, yes; but the Italians are as capri-

cious as we are dull. César tells me that his father's operas have not held the stage."

"Were they fashionable in your time, aunt, when you were studying music at Milan?"

"Yes, they were often performed at that time. I used to hear them occasionally."

"And you like them now. They are associated with your girlhood. I can understand that they must have a peculiar charm for you."

"Yes, they are full of old memories."

"Do you never play or sing yourself, aunt?"

"I play a little sometimes, when I am quite alone."

"But never to give pleasure to other people? That seems unkind. I remember how proud my father was of your musical talent; but you would never let us hear you either at The Hook or in Parchment Street."

"I have never cared to play or sing before an audience—since I was a girl. You need not wonder at me, Mildred. Different people have different ways of thinking. My pleasure in music of late years has been the pleasure of a listener. Mr.

Castellani is good enough to gratify me sometimes, as he has done to-night, when he has nothing better to do."

"Do not say that," exclaimed Castellani, coming into the glow of the hearth, and seating himself beside Miss Fausset's armchair. "What can I have better to do than to commune with a sympathetic mind like yours—in the language of the dead? It is almost as if my father's vanished voice were speaking to you," he said, in caressing tones, bending down to kiss the thin pale hand which lay idle on the arm of the chair.

CHAPTER V.

THE FUTURE MIGHT BE DARKER.

GEORGE GRESWOLD was not the kind of man to sit down in idle submission to Fate under a great wrong or under a great loss. A feeling of blank despair had come upon him after his interview with Mrs. Bell, in the solitude of those deserted rooms where every object spoke to him of his wife's absence—where the influence of her mind and fancy was a part of the very atmosphere: so much so that in spite of her farewell letter in his breast-pocket he started every now and then from his reverie, fancying he heard her footstep in the corridor, or her voice in an adjoining room.

His conversation with Bell had brought him little comfort, but it had not convinced him of the evil in which his wife so firmly believed. There was little doubt in his mind that the woman he had married eighteen years ago was identical with

Mildred's young companion and John Fausset's *protégée*. But whether that mysterious *protégée* had been John Fausset's daughter was a question open to doubt. The suspicions of a jealous wife, the opinions of the servants' hall, were no conclusive proof.

On the other hand, the weight of evidence leaned to that one solution of the mystery in Mr. Fausset's conduct. That a man should charge himself with the care of a child of whose parentage and belongings he could give no satisfactory account—about whom, indeed, he seemed to have given no account at all—was a strange thing. Stranger still was his conduct in bringing that child into his own family, to the hazard of his domestic peace. Stranger even yet that he should have gone down to the grave without giving his daughter any explanation of his conduct from first to last—that he should have left the story of his *protégée* as dark at the end as it had been at the beginning.

Painfully conjuring back to life the phantom forms of a miserable past, George Greswold recalled the few facts which he had ever known of his first wife's history. She was an orphan, without relations

or friends. At eighteen years of age she had been transferred from a finishing-school at Brussels to the care of an English artist and his wife, called Mortimer—middle-aged people, the husband with a small talent, the wife with a small income, both of which went further in Brussels than they would have gone in England. They had an apartment on one of the new boulevards at Brussels and a summer retreat in the Ardennes. When the artist and his wife travelled, Vivien went with them, and it was on one of these occasions that George Greswold met her at Florence. Mr. Mortimer had let his apartment at Brussels for the winter, and had established himself in the Italian city, where he worked assiduously at a classic style of art which nobody ever seemed to buy, though a good many people pretended to admire.

Vivien Faux. It sounded like a *nom de fantasie*. She told him that she was nobody, and that she belonged to nobody. She had no home, no people, no surroundings, no history, no associations. She had been educated at an expensive school, and her clothes had been made at a fashionable

dressmaker's in the Rue Montagne de la Cour. Everything that a schoolgirl's fancy could desire had been provided for her.

“ So far as such things go, I was as well off as the most fortunate of my companions,” she told him ; “ but I was a friendless waif all the same, and my schoolfellows despised me. I drank the cup of scorn to the dregs.”

Seeing how painful this idea of her isolation was to her, George Greswold had been careful to avoid all questioning that might gall the open wound. In truth he had no keen curiosity about her past existence. He had taken her for what she was—interesting, clever, and in great need of a disinterested protector. It was enough for him to know that she had been educated as a lady, and that her character was spotless. His marriage had been one of those unions which are of all unions the most fatal—a marriage for pity. A marriage for money, for self-interest, ambition, or family pride may result happily. In a union of mutual interests there is at least a sense of equality, and love may grow with time and custom ; but in a marriage for pity the chain galls on

both sides, the wife oppressed by a sense of obligation, the husband burdened with a weight of duty.

Of his wife's resources, all George Greswold knew was that she had a life interest in thirty thousand pounds invested in Consols. The dividends were sent her half-yearly by a firm of solicitors, Messrs. Pergament & Pergament, of Lincoln's Inn Fields. She had received a letter from the firm a week before her last birthday, which was her twenty-first, informing her of her life interest in this sum, over which she would have no disposing power, nor the power to anticipate any portion of the interest. The half-yearly dividends, she was informed, would in future be sent directly to her at any address she might appoint.

In acknowledging this communication she begged to be informed from whom she had inherited this money, or whether it was the gift of a living benefactor, and whether the benefactor was a relative. The reply from Messrs. Pergament & Pergament was cold and formal. They regretted their inability to give her any information as to the source of her income. They were pledged to absolute

silence upon this point. In any other matter they would be happy to be of service to her.

George Greswold had married without a settlement. The then state of the law, and the conditions of his wife's income, made her independent of any husband whatever. He could not forestall or rob her of an income of which the capital was in the custody of other people, and over which she had no disposing power. He was a poor man himself at the time, living upon an allowance made him by his mother, eked out by the labour of his pen as a political and philosophical writer; but he had the expectation of the Enderby estate, an expectation which was all but certainty. One fact alone was known to him of his wife's surroundings which might help him to discover her history, and that was the name of the firm in Lincoln's Inn, Messrs. Pergament & Pergament, and to them he made up his mind to apply without loss of time.

He went to London on the day after Mildred's journey to Brighton, taking Pamela and her dog with him to an hotel near Hanover Square where he had occasionally stayed. Pamela had been much

disturbed by Mildred's letter, and was full of wonderment, but very submissive, and ready to do anything she was told.

"I don't want to be inquisitive or troublesome, uncle," she said, as they sat opposite each other in the train, "but I am sure there is something wrong."

"Yes, Pamela, there is something wrong; but it is something which will come right again in good time, I hope. All we can do is to be patient."

His look of quiet pain, and the haggard lines which told of sleepless nights and brooding thoughts, touched Pamela's tender heart; but she was wise enough to know that a sorrow big enough to part husband and wife is not a sorrow to be intruded upon by an outsider.

Mr. Greswold drove with his niece to the hotel, established her there with her maid and her terrier in a private sitting-room, and then started for Lincoln's Inn Fields in a hansom.

Messrs. Pergament's office had a solid and old-established air, as of an office that had only to do with wealth and respectability. The clerks in the outer room seemed to have grown old on the premises.

“I should like to see the senior member of the firm, if he is at liberty,” said Mr. Greswold.

“Mr. Champion Pergament is at Wiesbaden. He is a very old gentleman, and seldom comes to the office.”

“The next partner, then—”

“Mr. Danvers Pergament is at his place in Yorkshire. If you would like to see his son, Mr. Danvers jun.—”

“Yes, yes, he will do if there is no one else.”

“There is Mr. Maltby. The firm is now Pergament, Pergament, & Maltby.”

“Let me see Mr. Danvers Pergament, if you please. I don’t want to talk to a new man.”

“Mr. Maltby was articled to us seventeen years ago, sir, and has been in the firm ever since, but I believe Mr. Pergament is disengaged. Shall I take him your name?”

George Greswold sent in his card. His name would be known to some members of the firm, no doubt—possibly not to others. His married life had been brief.

He was received in a handsome office by a bald-

headed gentleman of about five-and-forty, who smiled upon him blandly from a background of oak wainscot and crimson cloth window-curtains, like an old-fashioned portrait.

"Pray be seated, Mr. Greswold," he said, with the visitor's card in his hand, and looking from the card to the visitor.

"Does my name tell you anything about me, Mr. Pergament?" asked Greswold gravely.

"George Ransome Greswold," read the lawyer slowly; "the name of Greswold is unfamiliar to me."

"But not that of Ransome. Sixteen years ago my name was George Ransome. I assumed the name of Greswold on my mother's death."

The solicitor looked at him with renewed attention, as if there were something to startle his professional equanimity in the former name.

"You remember the name of Ransome?" said Greswold interrogatively.

"Yes, it recalls certain events. Very sad circumstances connected with a lady who was our client. You would not wish me to go over that ground, I am sure, Mr. Greswold?"

“No, there is no occasion to do that. I hope you believe that I was blameless—or as free from blame as any man can be in his domestic conduct—in the matter to which you have alluded?”

“I have no reason to suppose otherwise. I have never been on the scene of the event. I knew nothing of it until nearly a year after it happened, and then my sources of information were of the slenderest, and my knowledge of painful details never went beyond this office. Pray be assured that I do not wish to say one word that can pain you; I would only ask you to consider me as a totally uninformed person.

I have no charge to make—upon anybody’s account. I have no questions to ask. The past is forgotten, so far as I and my firm are concerned.”

“Mr. Pergament, for me the past is still living, and it is exercising a baneful influence over my present existence. It may blight the rest of my life. You, perhaps, may help to extricate me from a labyrinth of perplexity. I want to know who my first wife was. What was the real name of the young lady who called herself Vivien Faux, and whom I

married under that name before the British Consul at Florence ? Who were her parents ?”

“I cannot tell you.”

“Do you mean that you cannot, or that you will not ?”

“I mean both. I do not know that unfortunate lady’s parentage. I have no positive knowledge on the subject, though I may have my own theory. I know that certain persons were interested in the young lady’s welfare, and that certain funds were placed in our charge for her maintenance. After her death, the capital for which we had been trustees reverted to those persons. *That* is the sum-total of the lady’s history so far as it is known to us.”

“Will you tell me the name of the person who gave my wife her income, who placed her at the school at Brussels, by whose instructions she was transferred to the care of Mr. and Mrs. Mortimer ? I want to know that man’s name, for that man must have been her father.”

“When my father and I undertook that business for my client, we pledged ourselves to absolute secrecy. The facts of the case are not known even

to the other members of the firm. The person in question was our client, and the secret was lodged with us. There is not a priest of the Church of Rome who holds the secrets of the confessional more sacred than we hold that secret."

"Even if by keeping it you blight and ruin an innocent man's life?"

"I cannot imagine any such consequence of our silence."

"You cannot? No! Fact is stranger than any man's imagination. Do you happen to know the name of my second wife?"

"I did not even know that you had married again. You were known to our firm as Mr. Ransome. We lost sight of you when you changed your name to Greswold."

"I have been married—happily married—for fourteen years; and the name of my wife was Fausset, Mildred Fausset, daughter of John Fausset, your client."

Mr. Pergament had taken up a penknife in a casual manner, and was trifling with a well-kept thumb-nail, a fine specimen of the filbert tribe, with

his eyelids lowered in an imperturbable thoughtfulness, as of a man who was rock. But, cool as he was, George Greswold noticed that at the name of Fausset the penknife gave a little jerk, and the outskirts of the filbert were in momentary danger. Mr. Pergament was too wary to look up, however. He sat placid, attentive, with flabby eyelids lowered over washed-out gray eyes. Mr. Pergament at five-and-forty was still in the chrysalis or money-making stage, and worked hard nearly all the year round. His father, at sixty-seven, was on the Yorkshire moors, pretending to shoot grouse, and just beginning to enjoy the butterfly career of a man who had made enough to live upon.

“Vivien Faux. Does not that sound to your ear like an assumed name, Mr. Pergament?” pursued Greswold. “Faux: the first three letters are the same as in Fausset.”

And then George Greswold told the solicitor how his second wife had recognised his first wife’s photograph, as the likeness of a girl whom she believed to have been her half-sister, and how this act threatened to divide husband and wife for ever.

“Surely Mrs. Greswold cannot be one of those bigoted persons who pin their faith upon a prohibition of the Canon Law as if it were the teaching of Christ—a prohibition which the Roman Church was always ready to cancel in favour of its elect?” said the lawyer.

“Unhappily my wife was taught in a very rigid school. She would perish rather than violate a principle.”

“But if your first wife were John Fausset’s natural daughter—what then? The law does not recognise such affinities.”

“No, but the Church does. The Roman Church could create a prohibitive affinity in the case of a cast-off mistress; and it is the privilege of our Anglican theology in its highest development to adopt the most recondite theories of Rome. For God’s sake be plain with me, Mr. Pergament! Was the girl who called herself Vivien Faux, John Fausset’s daughter, or was she not?”

“I regret that I cannot answer your question. My promise to my client was of the nature of an oath. I cannot violate that promise upon any

consideration whatever. I must ask you, Mr. Greswold, as a gentleman, not to urge the matter any farther."

"I submit," said Greswold hopelessly. "If it is a point of honour with you, I can say no more."

Mr. Pergament accompanied him to the threshold of the outer office, and the elderly clerk ushered him to the wide old landing-place beyond. The lawyer had been courteous, but not cordial. There was a shade of distrustfulness in his manner, and he had pretended to no sympathy with Mr. Greswold in his difficulties; but George Greswold felt that among those who knew the history of his former marriage there was not much likelihood of friendly feeling towards him. To them he was a man outside the pale.

He left the office sick at heart. This had been his only means of coming at the knowledge of his first wife's parentage, and this means had failed him utterly. The surprise indicated by that slight movement of the lawyer's hand at the first mention of John Fausset's name went far to convince him that Mildred's conviction was based on truth. Yet if

John Fausset were Mr. Pergament's client, it was very odd that Mr. Pergament should be ignorant of the circumstances of Mildred's marriage, and the name and surroundings of her husband. Odd assuredly, but not impossible. On reflection, it seemed by no means unnatural that Mr. Fausset should confide his secret to a stranger, and establish a trust with a stranger, rather than admit his family lawyer to his confidence. This provision for an illegitimate daughter would be an isolated transaction in his life. He would select a firm of approved respectability, who were unconcerned in his family affairs, with whom there was no possibility of his wife or daughter being brought into contact.

George Greswold drove from Lincoln's Inn to Queen Anne's Gate, where he spent ten minutes with Mrs. Tomkison, and learned all that lady could tell him about his wife's movements: how she had had a long interview with Mr. Cancellor before she started for Brighton, and how she was looking very ill and very unhappy. Provided with this small stock of information, he went back to the hotel and dined *tête-à-tête* with Pamela, who had the good

sense not to talk to him, and who devoted all her attentions to the scion of Brockenhurst Joe.

When the waiters had left the room for good, and uncle and niece were alone over their coffee, Greswold became more communicative.

“Pamela, you are a good, warm-hearted girl, and I believe you would go some way to serve me,” he said quietly, as he sat looking at Box, who had folded his delicately-pencilled legs in a graceful attitude upon the fender, and was amiably blinking at the fire.

“My dear uncle, I would cut off my head for you—”

“I don’t quite want that; but I want your loyal and loving help in this saddest period of my life—yes, the saddest; sadder even than the sorrow of last year; and yet I thought there could be no greater grief than that.”

“Poor Uncle George!” sighed Pamela, bending over the table to take his hand, and clasping it affectionately; “command me in anything. You know how fond I have always been of you—almost fonder than of my poor father. Perhaps,” she added

gravely, "it is because I always respected you more than I did him."

"I cannot confide in you wholly, Pamela—not yet; but I may tell you this much. Something has happened to part my wife and me—perhaps for life. It is her wish, not mine, that we should live the rest of our lives apart. There has been no wrong-doing on either side, mark you. There is no blame; there has been no angry feeling; there is no falling off in love. We are both the victims of an intolerable fatality. I would willingly struggle against my doom—defy Fate; but my wife has another way of thinking. She deems it her duty to make her own life desolate and to condemn me to a life-long widowhood."

"Poor Uncle George!"

"She is now at Brighton with her aunt, Miss Fausset. I am going there to-morrow morning to see her, if she will let me—perhaps for the last time. I want to take you with me; and if Mildred carries out her intention of spending the winter abroad, I want you to go with her. I want you to wind yourself into her confidence and into her heart, to

cheer and comfort her, and to shield her from the malice of the world. Her position will be at best a painful one—a wife and no wife—separated from her husband for a reason which she will hardly care to tell the world, perhaps will hardly confide to her dearest friend.”

“I will do anything you wish, uncle—go anywhere, to the end of the world. You know how fond I am of Aunt Mildred. I’m afraid I like her better than I do my sister, who is so wrapped up in that absurd baby that she is sometimes unendurable. But it seems so awfully strange that you and aunt should be parted,” continued Pamela, with a puzzled brow. “I can’t make it out one little bit. I—I don’t want to ask questions, Uncle George—at least only just one question: has all this mysterious trouble anything to do with Mr. Castellani?”

She turned crimson as she pronounced the name, but Greswold was too absorbed to notice her embarrassment.

“With Castellani? No. How should it concern him?” he exclaimed; and then, remembering

the beginning of evil, he added, "Mr. Castellani has nothing to do with our difficulty in a direct manner; but indirectly his presence at Enderby began the mischief."

"O, uncle, you were not jealous of him, surely?"

"Jealous of him? I jealous of Castellani or any man living? You must know very little of my wife or of me, Pamela, when you can ask such a question."

"No, no; of course not. It was absurd of me to suggest such a thing, when I know how my aunt adores you," Pamela said hastily.

In spite of this disavowal, she lay awake half through the night, tormenting herself with all manner of speculations and wild imaginings as to the cause of the separation between George Greswold and his wife and Castellani's connection with that catastrophe.

She went to Brighton with her uncle next day, Box and the maid accompanying them in a second-class compartment. They put up at an hotel upon the East Cliff, which was more domestic and

exclusive than the caravansaries towards the setting sun, and conveniently near Lewes Crescent.

“Shall I go with you at once, uncle?” asked Pamela, as Greswold was leaving the house. “I hope Miss Fausset is not a stern old thing, who will freeze me with a single look.”

“She is not so bad as that, but I will break the ice for you. I am going to see my wife alone before I take you to Lewes Crescent. You can go on the Madeira Walk with Peterson, and give Box an airing.”

George Greswold found his wife sitting alone near the open piano at which Castellani had made such exquisite music the night before. She had been playing a little, trying to find comfort in that grand music of Beethoven, which was to her as the prophecies of Isaiah, or the loftiest passages in the Apocalypse—seeking comfort and hope, but finding none. And now she was gazing sadly at the waste of waters, and thinking that her own future life resembled that barren sea—a wide and sunless waste, with neither haven nor ship in sight.

At the sound of her husband's footsteps entering unannounced at the further door she started up, with her heart beating vehemently, speechless and trembling. She felt as if they were meeting after years of absence—felt as if she must fling herself upon his breast and claim him as her own again, confessing herself too earthly a creature to live without that sweet human love.

She had to steel herself by the thought of obedience to a higher law than that of human passion. She stood before him deathly pale, but firm as a rock.

He came close up to her, laid his hand upon her shoulder, and looked her in the face, earnestly, solemnly even.

“Mildred, is it irrevocable? Can you sacrifice me for a scruple?”

“It is more than a scruple: it is the certainty that there is but one right course, and that I must hold by it to the end.”

“That certainty does not come out of your own heart or your own mind. It is Cancellor who has made this law for you—Cancellor, a fanatic, who

knows nothing of domestic love—Cancellor, a man without a wife and without a home. Is he to judge between you and me? Is he, who knows nothing of the sacredness of wedded ties, to be allowed to break them, only because he wears a cassock and has an eloquent tongue?”

“It was he who taught me my duty when I was a child. I accept his teaching now as implicitly as I accepted it then.”

“And you do not mind breaking my heart: that does not hurt you,” said Greswold.

His face was pallid as hers, and his lips trembled, half in anger, half in scorn.

“O, George, you know my own heart is breaking. There can be no greater pain possible to humanity than I have suffered since I left you.”

“And you will inflict this agony, and bear this agony? You will break two hearts because of an anomaly in the marriage law—a rag of Rome—a source of profit to Pope and priest—a prohibition made to be annulled—a trap to fill the coffers of the Church! Do you know how foolish a law it is, child, for which you show this blind reverence?

Do you know that it is only a bigoted minority among the nations that still abides by it? Do you know that in that great new world across the seas a woman may be a wife in one colony, and not a wife in another—honourable here, despised there? It is all too foolish. What is it to either of us if my first wife was your half-sister—a fact which neither of us can prove or disprove?”

“God help me! it is proved only too clearly to me. We bear the mark of our birthright in our faces. You must have seen that, George, long before I saw Fay’s portrait in your hands. Are we not alike?”

“Not with the likeness of sisters. There is a look which might be a family likeness—a look which puzzled me like the faint memory of a dream when first I knew you. It was long before I discovered what the likeness was, and where it lay. At most it was but a line here and there. The arch of the brow, the form of the eyelid, an expression about the mouth when you smile. Such accidental resemblances are common enough. She was as much like César Castellani as she is like you. I have

seen a look in his face that curiously recalls an expression of hers."

"George, if I were not convinced, do you think I would grieve you, and sacrifice all I have of earthly happiness? I cannot reason upon this question. My conscience has answered it for me."

"So be it. Let conscience be your guide, and not love. I have done."

He took both her hands in his, and held them long, looking in her face as he went on with what he had to say to her, gravely, without anger, but with a touch of coldness that placed her very far away from him, and marked the beginning of a life-long strangeness.

"It is settled, then," he said; "we part for ever; but we are not going to air our story in the law-courts, or fill latest editions of evening papers with the details of our misery. We don't want the law to annul our marriage upon the ground of a forbidden affinity, and to cast a slur upon our child in her grave."

"No, no, no!"

"Then, though we are to spend our lives apart

henceforward, in the eyes of the world you will still be my wife; and I would not have the lady who was once my wife placed in a false position. You cannot wander about the Continent alone, Mildred—you are too young and too attractive to travel without companionship. I have brought Pamela to be your companion. The presence of my niece at your side will tell the world that you have done no wrong to me or my name. It may be fairly supposed that we part from some incompatibility of temper. You need give no explanations; and you may be assured I shall answer no questions.”

“You are very good,” she faltered. “I shall be glad to have your niece with me, only I am afraid the life will be a dreary one for her.”

“She does not think that. She is much attached to you. She is a frank warm-hearted girl, with some common sense under a surface of frivolity. She is at my hotel near at hand. If you think your aunt will give her hospitality, she can come to you at once, and you and she can discuss all your plans together. If there is anything in the way of business or money matters that I can arrange for you—”

“No, there is nothing,” she said in a low voice ; and then, suddenly, she knelt at his feet, and clasped his hand, and cried over it.

“George, tell me that you forgive me, before we part for ever,” she pleaded ; “pity me, dear ; pity and pardon !”

“Yes, I forgive you,” he said, gently raising her in his arms, and leading her to the sofa. “Yes, child, I pity you. It is not your fault that we are miserable. It may be better that we should part thus. The future might be still darker for us if we did not so part. Good-bye.”

He bent over her as she sat in a drooping attitude, with her forehead leaning against the end of the sofa, her hand and arm hanging lax and motionless at her side. He laid his hand upon her head as if in blessing, and then left her without another word.

“The future might be still darker if we did not part.” She repeated the sentence slowly, pondering it as if it had been an enigma.

Miss Fausset expressed herself pleased to

receive Miss Ransome as long as it might suit Mildred's convenience to stay in Lewes Crescent.

"Mr. Greswold has acted like a gentleman," she said, after Mildred had explained that it was her husband's wish his niece should accompany her abroad. "He is altogether superior to the common run of men. This young lady belongs to the Anglican Church, I conclude?"

"Decidedly."

"Then she cannot fail to appreciate the services at St. Edmund's," said Miss Fausset; and thereupon gave orders that the second-best spare room should be made ready for Miss Ransome.

Pamela arrived before afternoon tea, bringing Box, who was immediately relegated to the care of the maids in the basement, and the information that her uncle had gone back to Romsey *viâ* Portsmouth, and was likely to arrive at Enderby some time before midnight. Pamela was somewhat embarrassed for the first quarter of an hour, and was evidently afraid of Miss Fausset; but with her usual adaptability she was soon at home in that chilly and colourless drawing-room. She was

even reconciled to the banishment of Box, feeling that it was a privilege to have him anywhere in that orderly mansion, and intending to get him clandestinely introduced into her bedroom when the household retired for the night.

She pictured him as pining with grief in his exile, and it would have disillusioned her could she have seen him basking in the glow of the fire in the housekeeper's room, snapping up pieces of muffin thrown him by Franz, and beaming with intelligence upon the company.

A larger tea-table than usual had been set out in the inner drawing-room, with two teapots, and a tempting array of dainty biscuits and tea-cakes, such as the idle mind loveth. It was Miss Fausset's afternoon for receiving her friends, and from four o'clock upwards carriages were heard to draw up below, and loquacious matrons with silent daughters dribbled into the room and talked afternoon tea-talk, chiefly matters connected with the church of St. Edmund's and the various charities and institutions associated with that edifice.

It seemed very slow, dull talk to the ears of

Pamela, who had been vitiated by sporting society, in which afternoon tea generally smelt of cartridges or pigskin, and where conversation was sometimes enlivened by the handing round of a new gun, or a patent rat-trap, for general inspection. She tried to make talk with one of the youngest ladies present, by asking her if she was fond of tennis: but she felt herself snubbed when the damsel told her she had one of the worst districts in Brighton, and no time for amusements of any kind.

Everybody had taken tea, and it was nearly six o'clock when the feminine assembly became suddenly fluttered and alert at the announcement of two gentlemen of clerical aspect: one tall, bulky, shabby, and clumsy-looking, with a large pallid face, heavy features, heavier brows; the other small and dapper, dressed to perfection in a strictly clerical fashion, with fair complexion and neat auburn beard. The first was Mr. Maltravers, Vicar of St. Edmund's; the second was his curate, the Honourable and Reverend Percival Cromer, fourth son of Lord Lowestoft. It was considered a grand thing for St. Edmund's that it had a man of

acknowledged power and eloquence for its vicar, and a peer's son for its curate.

Mr. Cromer was at once absorbed by a voluble matron who, with her three daughters, had lingered in the hope of his dropping in after vespers; but he contrived somehow to release himself from the sirens, and to draw Miss Ransome into the conversation. Miss Fausset in the meantime made the Vicar known to Mildred.

“You have often heard me speak of my niece,” she said, when the introduction had been made.

Mildred was sitting apart from the rest, in the bay-window of the inner room. She had withdrawn herself there on pretence of wanting light for her needlework, the same group of azaleas she had been working upon at Enderby, but really in order to be alone with her troubled thoughts; and now Miss Fausset approached her with the tall, ponderous figure of the priest, in his long threadbare coat.

She looked up, and found him scrutinising her intently under his heavy brows. It was a clever face that so looked at her, but it did not engage her sympathy, or convince her of the owner's

goodness, as Clement Cancellor's face had always done.

"Yes, I have heard you speak of Mrs. Greswold, your only near relative, I think," he said, addressing Miss Fausset, but never taking his eyes off Mildred.

He dropped into a chair near Mildred, and Miss Fausset went back to her duty at the tea-table, and to join in the conversation started by Mr. Cromer, which had more animation than any previous talk that afternoon.

"You find your aunt looking well, I hope, Mrs. Greswold?" began the Vicar, not very brilliantly, but what his speech wanted in meaning was made up by the earnestness of his dark gray eyes, under beetling brows, which seemed to penetrate Mildred's inmost thoughts.

"Yes, she looks—as she has always done since I can remember—like a person superior to all mortal feebleness."

"She is superior to all other women I have ever met, a woman of truly remarkable power and steadfastness; but with natures like hers the sword

is sometimes stronger than the scabbard. That slender, upright form has an appearance of physical delicacy, as well as natural refinement. Your aunt's mind is a tower of strength, Mrs. Greswold. She has been my strong rock from the beginning of my ministry here; but I tremble for the hour when her health may break down under the task-work she exacts from herself."

"I know that she has a district, but I do not know the details of her work," said Mildred. "Is it very hard?"

"It is very hard, and very continuous. She labours unremittingly among the poor, and she does a great deal of work of a wider and more comprehensive kind. She is deaf to no appeal to her charity. The most distant claims receive her thoughtful attention, even where she does not feel it within the boundary-line of her duty to give substantial aid. She writes more letters than many a private secretary; and, O Mrs. Greswold—to you as very near and dear to her—I may say what I would say to no other creature living. It has been my blessed office to be brought face to

face with her in the sacrament of confession. I have seen the veil lifted from that white and spotless soul; spotless, yes, in a world of sinners! I know what a woman your aunt is."

His low searching tones fell distinctly upon Mildred's ear, yet hardly rose above a whisper. The babble, lay and clerical, went on in the other drawing-room, and these two were as much alone in the shadow of the window-curtains and the gray light of the fading day as if they had been priest and penitent in a confessional.

CHAPTER VI.

HIGHER VIEWS.

AFTER that interview with her husband, which in her own mind meant finality, Mildred Greswold's strength succumbed suddenly, and for more than a week she remained in a state of health for which Miss Fausset's doctor could find no name more specific than low fever. She was not very feverish, he told her aunt. The pulse was rapid and intermittent, but the temperature was not much above the normal limit. She was very weak and low, and she wanted care. He had evidently not quite made up his mind whether she wanted rousing or letting alone—whether he would recommend her to spend the winter at Chamounix and do a little mountaineering, or to vegetate at Nice or Algiers. "We must watch her," he said gravely. "She must not be allowed to go into a decline."

Miss Fausset looked alarmed at this, but her

doctor, an acquaintance of fifteen years, assured her that there was no cause for alarm; there was only need of care and watchfulness.

“Her mother died at six-and-thirty,” said Miss Fausset—“faded away gradually, without any ostensible disease. My brother did everything that care and forethought could do, but he could not save her.”

“Mrs. Greswold must not be allowed to fade away,” replied the doctor, with an air of being infallible.

Directly she was well enough to go down to the drawing-room again, Mildred began to talk of starting for Switzerland or Germany. She had inflicted herself and her surroundings upon Lewes Crescent too long already, she told her aunt; and although Miss Fausset expressed herself delighted to have her niece, and reconciled even to Pamela’s frivolity and the existence of Box in the lower regions, Mildred felt somehow that her presence interfered with the even tenor of life in that orderly mansion. The only person who made light of Miss Fausset’s idiosyncrasies, came to the house at all hours, stayed as late as he chose, disturbed the

symmetry of the book-shelves, left Miss Fausset's cherished books lying about on chairs and sofas, and acted in all things after his own fancy, was César Castellani. His manner towards Miss Fausset was unalterably deferential; he never wavered in his respect for her as a superior being; he was full of subtle flatteries and delicate attentions; yet in some wise his ways were the ways of a spoiled child, sure of indulgence and favour. He never stayed in the house, but had his room at an hotel on the cliff, and came to Lewes Crescent whenever fancy prompted, for two or three days at a stretch, then went back to London, and was seen no more for a week or so.

Mildred found that Pamela and Mr. Castellani had seen a great deal of each other during her illness. They had sung and played together, they had walked on the cliff—in sight of the drawing-room windows the whole time, Pamela explained, and with Miss Fausset's severe eye upon them. They had devoted themselves together to the education of Box, who had learnt at least three new tricks under their joint instruction, and who, possibly from

over-pressure, had acquired a habit of trying to bite Mr. Castellani whenever he had an opportunity.

“It is because he is such a horribly unmusical dog,” explained Pamela. “He managed to creep up to the drawing-room the other day when Miss Fausset was at church, and Mr. Castellani came in and began to play, and that dreadful Box planted himself near the piano and howled piteously till I carried him out.”

“My dearest Pamela, I don’t think Box’s opinion of Mr. Castellani or his music matters much,” said Mildred, with gentle gravity, as she lay on the sofa in the back drawing-room, with Pamela’s hand clasped in hers; “but it matters a great deal what you think of him, and I fear you are beginning to think too much about him.”

“Why should I not think of him, aunt, if I like—and he likes? I am my own mistress; there are few girls so independent of allties; for really nobody cares a straw for me except you and Uncle George. Rosalind is wrapped up in her baby, and Henry is devoted to pigeons, guns, and fishing-tackle. Do you think it can matter to them whom I marry?

Why should I be sordid, and say to myself, 'I have fifteen hundred a year, and I mustn't marry a man with less than three thousand'? Why should I not marry genius if I like—genius even without a penny?"

"If you could meet with genius, Pamela."

"You think that Mr. Castellani is not a genius?"

"I think not. He is too versatile and too showy. All his gifts are on the surface. Genius is single-minded, aiming at one great thing. Genius is like still water and runs deep. I admit that Mr. Castellani is highly gifted as a musician of the lighter sort; not a man who will leave music behind him to live for ever. I admit that he has written a strangely attractive book. But I should be sorry to call him a genius. I should be very sorry to see you throw yourself away, as I believe you would if you were to marry him."

"That is what a girl's friends always say to her," exclaimed Pamela. "To marry the man one loves is to throw oneself away." And then blushing furiously, she added, "Pray don't suppose that I am in love with Mr. Castellani. There has never been one

word of love between us—except in the clouds, by way of philosophical discussion. But, as a fatherless and motherless girl of advanced opinions, I claim the right to marry genius, if I choose.”

“My dear girl, I cannot dispute your independence; but I think the sooner we leave this house the better. The first thing is to make up our minds where we are to go.”

“I don’t care a bit, aunt; only you must not leave Brighton till you are much stronger. You will want at least three weeks before you will be able to stand the fatigue of travelling,” said Pamela, surveying the invalid with a critical air.

“We can travel by easy stages. I am not afraid of fatigue. Where shall we go, Pamela—Schwalbach, Wiesbaden, Vevay, Montreux?”

“O, not Schwalbach, aunt. They took me there for iron five years ago, when I had outgrown my strength. Switzerland is always lovely, of course; but I went there with Rosalind after her baby was born, and endured the dreariest six weeks of my existence. Brighton is absolutely delicious at this time of the year. It would be absurd to rush away

from the place just when people are beginning to come here."

Mildred saw that the case was hopeless, and she began to think seriously about her responsibilities in this matter : a frank impetuous girl, her husband's niece, eager to cast in her lot with a man who was obviously an adventurer, living sumptuously with hardly any obvious means, and who might be a scoundrel. She remembered her impression of the face in the church, the Judas face, as she had called it in her own mind : a foolish impression, perhaps, and it might be baseless ; yet such first impressions are sometimes warnings not to be lightly set at naught. As yet nothing had come of that warning : no act of Castellani's had shown him a villain ; but his advent had begun the misery of her life. Had she never seen him she never might have known this great sorrow. His presence was a constant source of irritation, tempting her to questioning that might lead to further misery. Fay's image had been constantly in her mind of late. She had brooded over that wedded life of which she knew nothing—over that early death which for her was shrouded in mystery.

“And he could tell me so much, perhaps,” she said to herself one evening, sitting by the fire in the inner room, while Castellani played in the distance yonder between the tall windows that let in the gray eastern light.

“Her death was infinitely sad.”

Those were the words which he had spoken of George Greswold's first wife: of Fay, her Fay, the one warm love of her childish years, the love that had stayed with her so long after its object had vanished from her life. That there was something underlying those words, some secret which might add a new bitterness to her sorrow, was the doubt that tortured Mildred as she sat and brooded by the fire, while those lovely strains of Mendelssohn's “I waited for the Lord” rose in slow solemnity from the distant piano, breathing sounds of peacefulness where there was no peace.

Mr. Castellani had behaved admirably since her convalescence. He had asked no questions about her husband, had taken her presence and Pamela's for granted, never hinting a curiosity about this sudden change of quarters. Mildred thought that

her aunt had told him something about her separation from her husband. It was hardly possible that she could have withheld all information, seeing the familiar terms upon which those two were; and it might be, therefore, that his discretion was the result of knowledge. He had nothing to learn, and could easily seem incurious.

Mildred now discovered that one source of Castellani's influence with her aunt was the work he had done for the choir of St. Edmund's. It was to his exertions that the choral services owed their excellence. The Vicar loved music only as a child or a savage loves it, without knowledge or capacity; and it was Castellani who chose the voices for the choir, and helped to train the singers. It was Castellani who assisted the organist in the selection of recondite music, which gave an air of originality to the services at St. Edmund's, and brought the odour of mediævalism and the fumes of incense into the Gothic chancel. Castellani's knowledge of music, ancient and modern, was of the widest. It was his musical erudition which gave variety to his improvisations. He could delight an admiring circle with

meandering reminiscences of Lully, Corelli, Dussek, Spohr, Clementi, Cherubini, and Hummel, in which only the modulations were his own.

In this interval of convalescence Mrs. Greswold's life fell into a mechanical monotony which suited her as well as any other kind of life would have done. For the greater part of the day she sat in the low armchair by the fire, a table with books at her side, and her work-basket at her feet. Those who cared to observe her saw that she neither worked nor read. She took up a volume now and again, opened it, looked at a page with dreamy eyes for a little while, and then laid it aside. She took up the frame with the azaleas, worked half-a-dozen stitches, and put the frame down again. Her days were given to long and melancholy reveries. She lived over her married life, with all its happiness, with its one great pain. She contemplated her husband's character—such a perfect character it had always seemed to her; and yet his one weak act, his one suppression of truth, had wrought misery for them both. And then with ever-recurring persistency she thought of Fay, and Fay's unexplained fate.

"I know him so well, his wife of fourteen years," she said to herself. "Can I doubt for an instant that he did his duty to her; that he was loyal and kind; that whatever sadness there was in her fate it could have been brought about by no act of his?"

Pamela behaved admirably all this time. She respected Mildred's silence, and was not overpoweringly gay. She would sit at her aunt's feet working, wrapped in her own thoughts, or poring over a well-thumbed Shelley, which seemed to her to express all her emotions for her without any trouble on her part. She found her feelings about César Castellani made to measure, as it were, in those mystic pages, and wondered that she and Shelley could be so exactly alike.

When Mildred was well enough to go out of doors Miss Fausset suggested a morning with her poor.

"It will brace your nerves," she said, "and help you to make up your mind. If you have really a vocation for the higher life, the life of self-abnegation and wide usefulness, the sooner you enter upon it the better. Mind, I say *if*. You know I have

given you my advice conscientiously as a Christian woman, and my advice is that you go back to your husband, and forget everything but your duty to him."

"Yes, aunt, I know; but you and I think differently upon that point."

"Very well," with an impatient sigh. "You are obstinate enough there: you have made up your mind so far. You had better make it up a little further. At present you are halting between two opinions."

Mildred obeyed with meekness and indifference. She was not interested in Miss Fausset's district; she had given no thought yet to the merits of life in a Christian community, among a handful of pious women working diligently for the suffering masses. Her only thought had been of that which she had lost, not of what she might gain.

Miss Fausset came in from the morning service at half-past eight, breakfasted sparingly, and at nine the *ne plus ultra* brougham, the perfection of severity in coach-building, was at the door, and the perfect brown horse was champing his bit and rattling his

brazen headgear in over-fed impatience to be off. It seemed to be the one aim of this powerful creature's life to run away with Miss Fausset's brougham, but up to this point his driver had circumvented him. He made very light of the distance between the aristocratic East Cliff and the shabbiest outlying district of Brighton, at the fag end of the London Road, and here Mildred saw her aunt in active work as a ministering angel to the sick and the wretched.

It was only the old, old story of human misery which she saw repeated under various forms; the old, old evidence of the unequal lots that fall from the urn of Fate—Margaret in her sky-blue boudoir, Peggy staggering under her basket of roses—for some only the flowers, for others only the thorns. She saw that changeless background of sordid poverty which makes every other sorrow harder to bear; and she told herself that the troubles of the poor were heavier than the troubles of the rich. Upon her life sorrow had come, like a thunderbolt out of a summer sky; but sorrow was the warp and woof of these lives; joy or good luck of any kind would have been the thunderclap.

She saw that her aunt knew how to deal with these people, and that underneath Miss Fausset's hardness there was a great power of sympathy. Her presence seemed everywhere welcome; and people talked freely to her, unbosoming themselves of every trouble, confident in her power to understand.

"Me and my poor husband calls your aunt our father confessor, ma'am," said a consumptive tailor's wife to Mildred. "We're never afraid to tell her anything—even if it seems foolish like—and she always gives us rare good advice—don't she, Joe?"

The invalid nodded approvingly over his basin of beef-tea, Miss Fausset's beef-tea, which was as comforting as strong wine.

In one of the houses they found an Anglican Sister, an elderly woman, in a black hood, to whom Miss Fausset introduced her niece. There was an old man dying by inches in the next room; and the Sister had been sitting up with him all night, and was now going home to the performance of other duties. Mildred talked with her for some time about her life, and heard a great many details of

that existence which seemed to her still so far off, almost impossible, like a cold pale life beyond the grave. How different from that warm domestic life at Enderby ! amidst fairest surroundings, in those fine old rooms, where every detail bore the impress of one's own fancy, one's own pursuits : a selfish life, perhaps, albeit tempered with beneficence to one's immediate surroundings ; selfish inasmuch as it was happy and luxurious, while true unselfishness must needs surrender everything, must refuse to wear purple and fine linen and to fare sumptuously, so long as Lazarus lies at the gate shivering and hungry.

Her aunt almost echoed her thoughts presently when she spoke of her goodness to the poor.

“ Yes, yes, Mildred, I do some little good,” she said, almost impatiently ; “ but not enough—not nearly enough. It is only women like that Sister who do enough. What the rich give must count for very little in the eyes of the Great Auditor. But I do my best to make up for a wasted girlhood. I was as foolish and as frivolous as your young friend Pamela once.”

“That reminds me, aunt, I want so much to talk to you about Pamela.”

“What of her?”

“I am afraid that she admires Mr. Castellani.”

“Why should she not admire him?”

“But I suspect she is in danger of falling in love with him.”

“Let her fall in love with him—let her marry him—let her be happy with him if she can.”

There was a recklessness in this counsel which shocked Mildred, coming from such a person as Miss Fausset.

“My dear aunt, it is a very serious matter. George gave Pamela to me for my companion. I feel myself responsible for her happiness.”

“Then don’t interfere with her happiness. Let her marry the man she loves.”

“With all my heart, if he were a good man, and if her uncle had no objection. But I know so little about Mr. Castellani and his surroundings.”

“He has no surroundings—his mother and father are dead. He has no near relatives.”

“And his character, aunt; his conduct? What do you know of those?”

“Only so much as you can see that I know of them. He comes to my house, and makes himself agreeable to me and my friends. He has given valuable help in the formation and management of the choir. If I am interested in a concert for a charity he sings for me, and works for me like a slave. All his talents are at my service always. I suppose I like him as well as I should like a favourite nephew, if I had nephews from whom to choose a favourite. Of his character—outside my house—I know nothing. I do not believe he has a wife hidden away anywhere; and if Pamela marries him, she can make her intention public in good time to prevent any fiasco of that kind.”

“You speak very scornfully, aunt, as if you had a poor opinion of Mr. Castellani.”

“Perhaps I have a poor opinion of mankind in general, Mildred. Your father was a good man, and your husband is another. We ought to think ourselves lucky to have known two such men in our lives. As to César Castellani, I tell you again I

know no more of him than you—or very little more—though I have known him so much longer.”

“How long have you known him?”

“About fifteen years.”

“And how was he introduced to you?”

“O, he introduced himself, on the strength of the old connection between the Faussets and the Felixes. It was just before he went to the University. He was very handsome, very elegant, and very much in advance of his years in manners and accomplishments. He amused and interested me, and I allowed him to come to my house as often as he liked.”

“Do you know anything about his means?”

“Nothing definite. He came into a small fortune upon his mother’s death, and ran through it. He has earned money by literary work, but I cannot tell you to what extent. If Miss Ransome marry him, I think she may as well make up her mind to keep him. He belongs to the butterfly species.”

“That is rather a humiliating prospect for a wife—rather like buying a husband.”

“That is a point for Miss Ransome to consider.

I don't think she is the kind of girl to care much what her whim costs her."

The brown horse, panting for more work, drew up in front of Miss Fausset's house at this juncture, fidgeted impatiently while the two ladies alighted, and then tore round to his mews.

"You've had a handful with him to-day, I guess, mate," said a humble hanger-on, as Miss Fausset's coachman stretched his aching arms. "He's a fine 'oss, but I'd rather you drove 'im than me."

"I'll tell you what he is," replied the coachman: "he's too good for his work. That's his complaint. Dodging in and out of narrer streets, and makin' mornin' calls upon work'ouse paupers, don't suit *him*."

The time had come when Mildred had to make up her mind where she would go, and having all the world to choose from, and just the same hopeless feeling that Eve may have had on leaving Eden, the choice was a matter of no small difficulty. She sat with a Continental "Bradshaw" in her hand, turning the leaves and looking at the maps, irre-

solute and miserable. Pamela, who might have decided for her, clearly hankered after no paradise but Brighton. Her idea of Eden was a house in which Castellani was a frequent visitor.

It was too late for most of the summer places, too early for Algiers or the Riviera. Pamela would not hear of the Rhine or any German watering-place. Montreux might do, perhaps, or the Engadine; but Pamela hated Switzerland.

“Would it not do to spend the winter in Bath?” she said. “There is very nice society in Bath, I am told.”

“My dear Pamela, I want to get away from society if I can; and I want to be very far from Enderby.”

“Of course. It was thoughtless of me to suggest a society place. Bath, too, within a stone’s throw. Dearest aunt, I will offer no more suggestions. I will go anywhere you like.”

“Then let us decide at once. We will go to Pallanza, on Lago Maggiore. I have heard that it is a lovely spot, and later we can go on to Milan or Florence.”

“To Italy! That is like the fulfilment of a dream,” said Pamela with a sigh, feeling that Italy without César Castellani would be like a playhouse when the curtain has gone down and all the lights are out.

She was resigned, however, and not without hope. Castellani might propose before they left Brighton, when he found that parting was inevitable. He had said some very tender things, but of that vaguely tender strain which leaves a man uncommitted. His words had been full of poetry, but they might have applied to some absent mistress, or to love in the abstract. Pamela felt that she had no ground for exultation.

It was in vain that Mildred warned her against the danger of such an alliance.

“Consider what a wretched match it would be for you, Pamela,” she said. “Think how different from your sister Rosalind’s marriage.”

“Different! I should hope so, indeed! Can you imagine, Aunt Mildred, that *I* would marry such a man as Sir Henry Mountford, a man who has hardly a thought outside his stable and his gun-

room? Do you know that he spends quite a quarter of every day in the saddle-room, allowing for the wet days, on which he almost lives there? I asked him once why he didn't have his lunch sent over to the stables, instead of keeping us waiting a quarter of an hour, and coming in at last smelling like a saddler's shop."

"He is a gentleman, notwithstanding, Pamela, and Rosalind seems to get on very well with him."

"‘As the husband is the wife is,’ don't you know, aunt. You and Uncle George suit each other because you are both intellectual. I should be miserable if I married a man who had done nothing to distinguish himself from the common herd."

"Perhaps. But do you think you could be very happy married to an accomplished idler who would live upon your fortune—who would have everything to gain, from the most sordid point of view, by marrying you, and of whose fidelity you could never be sure?"

"But I should be sure of him. My instinct would tell me if he were really in love with me. You must think me very silly, Aunt Mildred, if you

think I could be deceived in such a matter as that."

In spite of Pamela's confidence in her own instinct, or, in other words, in her own wisdom, Mildred was full of anxiety about her, and was very eager to place her charge beyond the reach of César Castellani's daily visits and musical talent. She felt responsible to her husband for his niece's peace of mind; doubly responsible in that Pamela's interest had been subordinated to her own comfort and well-being.

She had other reasons for wishing to escape from Mr. Castellani's society. That instinctive aversion she had felt at sight of the unknown face in the church was not altogether a sentiment of the past, a prejudice overcome and forgotten. There were occasions when she shrank from the Italian's gentle touch, a delicate white hand hovering for a moment above her own as he offered her a book or a newspaper; there were times when his low sympathetic voice was a horror to her; there were times when she told herself that her self-respect as a wife hardly

permitted of her breathing the same air that he breathed.

Innocent and simple-minded as her closely-sheltered life had kept her, in all thoughts, ways, and works unlike the average woman of society, Mildred Greswold was a woman, and she could not but see that César Castellani's feelings for her were of a deeper kind than any sentiment with which Pamela Ransome's charms had inspired him. There were moments when his voice, his face, his manner told his secret only too plainly; but these were but glimpses of the truth, hurried liftings of the curtain, which the man of society let drop again before he had too plainly betrayed himself. He had been careful to keep his secret from Pamela. It was only to the object of his worship that he had revealed those presumptuous dreams of his, and to her only in such wise as she must needs ignore. It would have seemed self-conscious prudery to rebuke indications so subtle and so casual; but Mildred could not ignore them in her own mind, and she waited anxiously for the hour in which she would be well enough to travel. She had all her plans

made, had engaged a courier—a friend of Miss Fausset's Franz—and had arranged her route with him : first Northern Italy, and then the South. She wanted to make Pamela's exile as bright and as profitable to her as she could. The life she was arranging was by no means the kind of life that Clement Cancellor would have counselled. It would have seemed to that stern labourer a life of self-indulgence and frivolity. But the time for the higher ideal would come by and by, perhaps, when this sense of misery, this benumbed feeling of indifference to all things, had worn off, and she should be strong enough to think a little more about other people's sorrows and a little less about her own.

Mr. Maltravers urged upon her the duty of staying in Brighton, and working as her aunt worked. He had been told that Mrs. Greswold was a woman of independent fortune, and that she had separated herself from a husband she fondly loved, upon a question of principle. It was just such a woman as this that Samuel Maltravers liked to see in his church. Such women were the elect of the earth, predestined to contribute to the advancement of

clerics and the building of chancels and transepts. The chancel at St. Edmund's was a noble one, needing no extension, its only fault being that it was too big for the church. But there was room for a transept. The church had been so planned as to allow of its ultimate cruciform shape, and that transept was the dream of Mr. Maltravers' life. Scarcely had Mrs. Greswold's story dropped in measured syllables from Miss Fausset's lips than Mr. Maltravers said to himself, "This lady will build my transept." A woman who could leave a beloved husband on a question of principle was just the kind of woman to sink a few superfluous thousands upon the improvement of such a fane as St. Edmund's. Every seat in that fashionable temple was occupied. More seat-room was a necessity. The hour had come, and the—woman.

Mr. Maltravers endeavoured to convince Mrs. Greswold that Brighton was the one most fitting sphere for an enlightened woman's labours. Brighton cried aloud for a Christian sister's aid. It had all the elements in which the heaven-born missionary delights. Phenomenal wealth on the one side, abject

poverty on the other; fashion in the foreground, sin and misery behind the curtain. Brighton was Pagan Rome in little. Together with the advanced civilisation, the over-refinement, the occult pleasures, the art, the luxury, the beauty, the burning of the Seven-hilled City, Brighton had all the corrupting influences of her Pagan sister. Brighton was rotten to the core—a lovely simulacrum—a Dead Sea apple—shining, golden, doomed, damned.

As he uttered that last terrific word Mr. Maltravers sank his voice to that bass depth some of us can remember in Bishop Wilberforce's climatic syllables; and so spoken, the word seemed permissible in any serious drawing-room, awful rather than profane.

It was in vain, however, that the Vicar of St. Edmund's strove to convince Mildred that her mission was immediate, and in Brighton; that in his parish, and there alone, could her loftiest dreams find their fulfilment.

"I hope to do some little good to my fellow-creatures by and by," she said meekly, "but I do not feel that the time has come yet. I am inca-

pable of anything except just existing. I believe my aunt has told you that I have had a great sorrow—”

“ Yes, yes, poor wounded heart, I know, I know.”

“ I mean to work by and bye—when I have learned to forget myself a little. Sorrow is so selfish. Just now I feel stupid and helpless. I could do no good to any one.”

“ You could build my transept,” thought Mr. Maltravers, but he only sighed, and shook his head, and murmured gently, “ Well, well, we must wait; we must hope. There is but one *earthly* consolation for a great grief—I will say nothing of heavenly comfort—and that consolation is to be found in labouring for the good of our sinning, sorrowing fellow-creatures, and for the glory of God—for the glory of God,” repeated Mr. Maltravers, harping on his transept. “ There are mourners who have left imperishable monuments of their grief, and of their piety, in some of the finest churches of this land.”

Upon the evening on which Mr. Maltravers had pleaded for Brighton, Miss Fausset and her *protégé* were alone together during the half-hour before

dinner; the lady resting after a long day in her district: a composed, quiet figure, in fawn-coloured silk gown and point lace kerchief, seated erect in the high-backed chair, with folded hands, and eyes gazing thoughtfully at the fire; the gentleman lounging in a low chair on the other side of the hearth in luxurious self-abandonment, his red-brown eyes shining in the fire-glow, and his red-brown hair throwing off glints of light.

They had been talking, and had lapsed into silence; and it was after a long pause that Miss Fausset said,

“I wonder you have not made the young lady an offer before now.”

“Suppose I am not in love with the young lady?”

“You have been too assiduous for that supposition to occur to me. You have haunted this house ever since Miss Ransome has been here.”

“And yet I am not in love with her.”

“She is a pretty and attractive girl, and disposed to think highly of you.”

“And yet I am not in love with her,” he repeated, with a smile which made Miss Fausset angry. “To

think that you should turn matchmaker, you who have said so many bitter things of the fools who fall in love, and the still greater fools who marry; *you* who stand alone like a granite monolith, like Cleopatra's Needle, or the Matterhorn, or anything grand and solitary and unapproachable; you to counsel the civilised slavery we call marriage!"

"My dear César, I can afford to stand alone; but you cannot afford to surrender your chance of winning an amiable wife with fifteen hundred a year."

"That for fifteen hundred a year!" exclaimed Castellani, wafting an imaginary fortune from the tips of his fingers with airy insolence. "Do you think I will sell myself—for so little?"

"That high-flown tone is all very well; but there is one fact you seem to ignore."

"What is that, my kindest and best?"

"The fact that you are a very expensive person, and that you have to be maintained somehow."

"That fact shall never force me to marry where I cannot love. At the worst, art shall maintain me. When other and dearer friends prove unkind, I will call upon my maiden aunts the Muses."

“The Muses hitherto have hardly paid for the gardenias in your buttonhole.”

“O, I know I am not a man of business. I lack the faculty of pounds, shillings, and pence, which is an attribute of some minds. I have scattered my flowers of art upon all the highways instead of nailing the blossoms against a wall and waiting for them to bear fruit. I have been reckless, improvident—granted; and you, out of your abundance, have been kind. Your words imply a threat. You wish to remind me that your kindness cannot go on for ever.”

“There are limits to everything.”

“Hardly to your generosity; certainly not to your wealth. As you garner it, that must be inexhaustible. I cannot think that you would ever turn your back upon me. The link between us is too tender a bond.”

Miss Fausset's face darkened to deepest night.

“Tender do you call it?” she exclaimed. “If the memory of an unpardonable wrong is tender—” and then, interrupting herself, she cried passionately, “César Castellani, I have warned you against the

slightest reference to the past. As for my generosity, as you call it, you might be wiser if you gave it a lower name—caprice; caprice which may weary at any moment. You have a chance of making an excellent match, and I strongly advise you to take advantage of it.”

“Forgive me if I disregard your advice, much as I respect your judgment upon all other subjects.”

“You have other views, I suppose, then?”

“Yes, I have other views.”

“You look higher?”

“Infinitely higher,” he answered, with his hands locked above his head in a carelessly graceful attitude, and with his eyes gazing at the fire.

He looked like a dreaming fawn: the large, full eyes, the small peaked beard, and close-cut hair upon the arched forehead were all suggestive of the satyr tribe.

The door opened, and Pamela came smiling in, self-conscious, yet happy, delighted at seeing that picturesque figure by the hearth.

CHAPTER VII.

THE TIME HAS COME.

THREE days later Mildred and her young companion started for Italy. The doctor declared that the departure was premature—Mrs. Greswold was not strong enough to undertake such a fatiguing journey. But modern civilisation has smoothed the roads that lead over the civilised world, and for a lady who travels with a maid and a courier, journeys are rendered very easy; besides, Mildred had made up her mind to leave Brighton at any hazard.

The hour of parting came for Pamela and Castellani, and although the young lady took care to remind him at least a dozen times a day of that impending severance, not one word of the future, or of any cherished hope on his part, fell from his lips. And yet it had seemed to Pamela that he was devoted to her, that he only waited for the opportunity to speak. It seemed to her also that he felt the pain

of parting, for he had an air of deepest melancholy during these farewell days, and talked only of saddest themes. He was in Lewes Crescent nearly all day long—he played the mournfullest strains—he behaved like a man oppressed with a secret sorrow; but never a word of love or marriage did he breathe to Pamela. He pressed her hand gently, with an almost paternal affection, as she leant out of the carriage which was to take her to the station, and bade him a last good-bye.

“Good-bye!” she half sang, half sobbed, in the darkness at the back of the hired landau, as they drove bumping down St. James’s street. “Good-bye, summer; good-bye, everything!”

She did not even glance at Hannington’s autumn fashions as they drove up the hill. She felt that life was no longer worth dressing for.

“He never could have cared for me,” she thought, as she dropped her silent tears upon Box’s thoroughbred neck, “and yet he seemed—he seemed! Does he seem like that to every girl, I wonder? Is he all seeming?”

After this came a leisurely journey, and then

long, slow weeks of a luxurious repose amidst fairest surroundings—a life which to those who have lived and fought the great battle, and come wounded but yet alive out of the fray, is the life paradisaic ; but for the fresh, strong soul panting for emotions and excitements, like a young bird that yearns to try the strength of his wings, this kind of languid existence seems like a foretaste of death and nothingness. Mountains and lakes were not enough for Pamela—the azure of an Italian sky, the infinite variety of sunset splendours, the brightness of a morning heralded by a roseate flush on snow-capped hills—all these were futile where the heart was empty. Mildred's maturer grief found some consolation in these exquisite surroundings ; but Pamela wanted to live, and those encircling mountains seemed to her as the walls of a gigantic prison.

“It was so nice at Brighton,” she said, looking along the burnished mirror of the lake with despondent eyes, tired of the mystery of those reflected mountains, descending into infinite depths, a world inverted: “so gay, so cheery—always something

going on. Don't you think, aunt, that the air of this place is very relaxing?"

That word relaxing is the keynote of discontent. It is a word that can blight the loveliest spots the sun ever shone upon. It is the speck upon the peach. Be sure that before ever he mentioned the apple, Satan told Eve that Eden was very relaxing.

"I hope you are not unhappy here, my dear Pamela?" said Mildred, evading the question.

"Unhappy? O, no, indeed, dear aunt! I could not be otherwise than happy with you anywhere. There are lots of people who would envy me living on the shore of Lago Maggiore, and seeing those delightful mountains all day long; but I did so enjoy Brighton—the theatre, the Pavilion: always something going on."

The two ladies had their own suite of apartments in the hotel, and lived in that genteel seclusion which is the privilege of wealth as well as of rank all over the world. Pamela envied the tourists of Cook and Gaze, as she saw them trooping into the *table d'hôte*, or heard their clatter in the public drawing-room. It was all very well to sit in one's

own balcony, gazing at the placid lake, while the rabble amused themselves below. One felt one's superior status, and the advantage of being somebody instead of nobody; but when the rabble danced or acted charades, or played dumb crambo, or squabbled over a game at nap, they seemed to have the best of it somehow.

"I almost wish I had been born a vulgarian," sighed Pamela one evening, when the tourists were revolving to the "Myosotis Waltz" banged out on a cast-iron grand in the salon below.

Mildred did all she could in the way of excursionising to enliven the dulness of their solitary life; but the beauties of Nature palled upon Pamela's lively mind. However the day might be occupied in drives to distant scenes of surpassing loveliness, the ever-lengthening evenings had to be spent in the Louis Quatorze salon, where no visitors dropped in to disturb the monotony of books and work, piano and pet-dog.

For Mildred, too, those evening hours seemed unutterably long, and as autumn deepened into winter, her burden seemed heavier to bear. Time

brought no consolation, offered no hope. She had lost all that had made life worth living. First, the child who represented all that was brightest and fairest and gayest and most hopeful in her life; next, the husband who was her life itself, the prop and staff, the column around which every tendril of her being was entwined. There was nothing for her in the future but a life of self-abnegation, of working and living for others. The prospect seemed dark and dreary, and she knew now how small a margin of her life had been devoted to God. The idea of devoting herself wholly was too repellent. She knew now that she was very human, wedded to earthly loves and earthly happiness, needing a long purgation before she could attain the saintly attitude.

She thought of Enderby every night as she sat in silent melancholy beside the hearth, where a solitary log crumbled slowly to white ashes on the marble, and where the faint warmth had a perfume of distant pine-woods; she thought of Enderby and its widowed master. Was he living there still, or was he, too, a wanderer? She had heard but little of his movements since she left

England. Pamela had written to him, and he had replied, but had said very little about himself. The only news in Rosalind's letters was of the extraordinary development—intellectual and otherwise—of the baby, and the magnitude of Sir Henry's bag. Beyond the baby and the bag, Lady Mountford's pen rarely travelled.

Mildred thought of that absent husband with an aching heart. There were times when she asked herself if she had done well—when she was tempted to total surrender—when the pen was in her hand ready to write a telegram imploring him to come to her—or when she was on the point of giving her orders for an immediate return to England. But pride and principle alike restrained her. She had taken her own course, she had made up her mind deliberately, after long thought and many prayers. She could not tread the backward way, the primrose path of sin. She could but pray for greater strength, for loftier purpose, for that grand power of self-forgetfulness which makes for heaven.

Christmas came and found her in this frame of mind. There were very few tourists now, and

the long corridors had a sepulchral air, the snowy mountain-tops were blotted out by mist and rain. For Pamela, Christmastide had been a season of much gaiety hitherto—a season of new frocks and many dances, hunting and hunt-balls, and the change was a severe test of that young lady's temper. She came through the ordeal admirably, never forgot that she had promised her uncle to be his wife's faithful companion, and amused herself as best she could with Italian music and desultory studies. She read Mr. Sinnett's books, studied Bohn's edition of Plato's Dialogues, addled her youthful brain with various theories of a far-reaching kind, and fancied herself decidedly mediumistic. That word mediumistic possessed a peculiar fascination for her. She had looked at César Castellani's eyeballs, which were markedly globular—seeming, as it were, reflecting surfaces for the spirit world, a sure indication of the mediumistic temperament. She had seen other signs; and now in this romantic solitude, sauntering by the lake in the misty winter air, just before sundown, she fancied herself almost in communion with that absent genius. Distance could

not separate two people when both were eminently mediumistic.

“I believe he is thinking of me at this very moment,” she said to herself one afternoon at the end of the year, “and I have a kind of feeling that I shall see him—bodily—very soon.”

She forgot to reckon with herself that this kind of feeling could count for very little, since she had experienced it in greater or less degree ever since she had left Brighton. In almost every excursion she had beguiled the tedium of the way with some pleasant day-dream. Castellani would appear in the most unlooked-for manner at the resting-place where they were to lunch. He would have followed them from England at his leisure, and would come upon them unannounced, pleased to startle her by his sudden apparition. In absence she had recalled so many tender speeches, so many indications of regard ; and she had taught herself to believe that he really cared for her, and had but been withheld from a declaration by a noble dignity which would not stoop to woo a woman richer than himself.

“He is poor and proud,” she thought.

Poor and proud. How sweet the alliteration sounded !

She had thought of him so incessantly that it was hardly a coincidence, and yet it seemed to her a miracle when his voice sounded behind her in the midst of her reverie.

“You ought not to be out of doors, Miss Ransome, when the sun is so nearly down.”

She turned and faced him, pale first with infinite pleasure, and then rosy to the roots of her flaxen hair.

“When did you come?” she asked eagerly.
“Have you been long in Italy?”

“I only came through the St. Gothard last night, breakfasted at Locarno, and came here by road. I have not seen Mrs. Greswold yet. She is well, I hope?”

“She is not over-well. She frets dreadfully, I am afraid. It is so sad that she and Uncle George should be living apart for some mysterious reason which nobody knows. They were the most perfect couple.”

“Mrs. Greswold is a perfect woman.”

“And Uncle George has the finest character. His first marriage was unhappy, I believe; nobody ever talked about it. I think it was only just known in the family that he had married in Italy when he was a young man, and that his wife had died within a year. It was supposed that she could not have been nice, since nobody knew anything about her.”

“Rather hard upon the dead lady to be condemned by her husband’s silence. Will you take me to your aunt?”

“With pleasure. I think she ought to be charmed to see you, for we lead the most solitary existence here. My aunt has set her face against knowing anybody, in the hotel or out of it. And there have been some really charming people staying here; people one would go out of one’s way to know. Have you come here for your health?”

“For my pleasure only. I was sick to death of England and of cities. I longed to steep myself in the infinite and the beautiful. Those indigo clouds above the mountains yonder—with that bold splash of orange shining through the gorge—are worth the

journey, were there no more than that ; and when the wintry stars glass themselves in the lake by and by, ah ! then one knows what it is to be the living, acting element in a world of passive beauty. And to think that there are men and women in London groping about in the fog, and fancying themselves alive !”

“ O, but there are compensations — theatres, concerts, dances.”

“ Miss Ransome, I fear you are a Philistine.”

“ O, no, no ! I adore Nature. I should like to be above those common earthly pleasures—to journey from star to star along the planetary chain, rising at each transition to a higher level, until I came to the spirit world where — This is the hotel, and we are on the second floor. Would you like the lift ?”

“ I never walk when I can be carried.”

“ Then we will go up in the lift. I used to think it rather good fun at first,” said Pamela with a sigh, remembering how soon that trivial excitement had begun to pall.

Mildred received the unexpected visitor with marked coldness ; but it was not easy to remain

persistently cold while Pamela was so warm. Castellani was one of those provoking people who refuse to see when they are unwelcome. He was full of talk, gay, bright, and varied. He had all the social events of the past three months to talk about. Society had witnessed the most extraordinary changes—marriages—sudden deaths—everything unlooked for. There had been scandals, too; but these he touched upon lightly, and with a deprecating air, professing himself sorry for everybody.

Mildred allowed him to talk, and was, perhaps, a little more cordial when he took his leave than she had been when he came. He had prevented her from thinking her own thoughts for the space of an hour, and that was something for which to be grateful. He had come there in pursuit of Pamela, no doubt. He could have no other reason. He had been playing his own game, holding back in order to be the more gladly accepted when he should declare himself. It was thus Mildred reasoned with herself; and yet there had been looks and tones which it was difficult for her to forget.

“He is by profession a lady-killer,” she argued ; “no doubt he treats all women in the same way. He cannot help trying to fascinate them ; and there are women like Cecilia Tomkison who encourage him to make sentimental speeches.”

She persuaded herself that the looks and tones which had offended meant very little. For Pamela’s sake she would like to think well of him.

“You have told me about a great many people,” she said, as he was leaving them, “but you have told me nothing about my husband. Did you hear if he was still at Enderby—and well?”

“He was still at Enderby up to the end of November, and I believe he was well. I spent three days at Riverdale, and heard of him from Mrs. Hillersdon.”

Mildred asked no further question, nor did she invite Mr. Castellani to repeat his visit. Happily for his own success in life, he was not the kind of person to wait for invitations.

“I am staying in the hotel,” he said. “I hope I may drop in sometimes—to-morrow even. Miss

Ransome is good enough to say she would like to sing some duets with me."

"Miss Ransome knows I have not been receiving any visitors," Mildred answered, with a touch of reproachfulness.

"O, but Mr. Castellani is an old friend! The people you avoided were strangers," said Pamela eagerly.

Mildred made no further protest. Few men would have accepted a permission so grudgingly given; but Castellani stopped at no obstacle when he had a serious purpose to serve: and in this case his purpose was very serious; for life or death, he told himself.

He came next day, and the day after that, and every day for four or five weeks, till the first flush of precocious spring lent beauty to the landscape and softness to the sky. Mildred submitted to his visits as an inevitable consequence of Pamela's folly; submitted, and by and by fell into the habit of being amused by Castellani; interested in his talk of men and women and of books, of which he seemed to have read all of any mark that had ever been

written. She allowed herself to be interested; she allowed herself to be soothed by his music; she let him become an influence in her life, unawares, caught by a subtlety that had never been surpassed by anybody of lesser gifts than Satan: but never did this presumptuous wooer beguile her into one single thought that wronged her absent husband. Her intellect acknowledged the tempter's intellectual sway, but her heart knew no wavering.

César Castellani had seen a good deal of life, but as he had assiduously cultivated the seamy side, it was hardly strange if he lacked the power of understanding a pure-minded woman. To his mind every woman was a citadel, better or worse defended, but always assailable by treason or strategy, force or art, and never impregnable. Mrs. Greswold was his Troy, his Thebes, his ideal of majesty and strength in woman. So far as virtue went upon this earth he believed Mildred Greswold to be virtuous; proud, too; not a woman to lower her crest to the illicit conqueror, or stain her name with the disgrace of a runaway wife. But it had been given to him to disturb a union that had existed happily for four-

teen years. It had been given to him to awaken the baneful passion of jealousy, to sow the seeds of suspicion, to part husband and wife. He had gone to work carelessly enough in the first instance, struck with Mildred's beauty and sweetness—full of sentimental recollections of the fair child-face and the bright streaming hair that had passed him like a vision in the sunlight of Hyde Park. He had envied the husband so fair a wife, so luxurious a home, with its air of old-world respectability, that deep-rooted English aristocracy of landed estate, which to the foreign adventurer seemed of all conditions in life the most enviable. He had been impelled by sheer malice when he uttered his careless allusion to George Greswold's past life, and with a word blighted two hearts.

He saw the effect of the speech in the face of the wife, and in the manner of the husband saw that he had launched a thunderbolt. It was with deepest interest he followed up his advantage; watched and waited for further evidence of the evil he had done. He was a close student of the faces of women; above all, when the face was lovely. He saw all the marks

of secret care in Mrs. Greswold's countenance during the weeks that elapsed between his first visit to Enderby and the charity concert. He saw the deepening shadows, the growing grief, and on the day of the concert he saw the traces of a still keener pain in those pale features and haggard eyes; but for an immediate separation between husband and wife he was not prepared.

He heard at Riverdale of Mrs. Greswold's departure from home. The suddenness and strangeness of her journey had set all the servants talking. He found out where she had gone, and hastened at once to call upon his devoted friend Mrs. Tomkison, who told him all she had to tell.

"There is some domestic misery—an intrigue on his part, I fear," said the glib Cecilia. "Men are such traitors. It would hardly surprise me to-morrow if I was told that Adam was maintaining an expensive *ménage* in St. John's Wood. She would tell me nothing, poor darling; but she sent for Mr. Cancellor, and was closeted with him for an hour. No doubt she told *him* everything. And then she went off to Brighton."

Castellani followed to Brighton, and his influence with Miss Fausset enabled him to learn something, but not all. Not one word said Miss Fausset about the supposed identity between George Greswold's first wife and John Fausset's *protégée*; but she told Mr. Castellani that she feared her niece's separation from her husband would be permanent.

"Why does she not divorce him," he asked, "if he has wronged her?"

"He has not wronged her—in the way you mean. And if he had, she could not divorce him, unless he had beaten her. You men made the law, and framed it in your own favour. It is a very sad case, César, and I am not at liberty to say any more about it. You must ask me no more questions."

Castellani obeyed for the time being; but he did ask further questions upon other occasions, and he exercised all his subtlety in the endeavour to extract information from Miss Fausset. That lady, however, was inflexible; and he had to wait for time to solve the mystery.

"They have parted on account of that first marriage," he told himself. "Perhaps she has found

out all about the poor lady's fate, and takes the worst view of the catastrophe. That would account for their separation. She would not stay with a husband she suspected ; he would not live with a wife who could so suspect. A very pretty quarrel."

A quarrel—a life-long severance—but not a divorce. There was the difficulty. César Castellani believed himself invincible with women. The weakest, and in some cases the worst, of the sex had educated him into the belief that no woman lived who could resist him. And here was a woman whom he intensely admired, and whose married life it had been his privilege to wreck. She was a rich woman—and it was essential to his success in life that he should marry wealth. With all his various gifts he was not a money-earning man, he would never attain even lasting renown by his talents. For when the good fairies had endowed him with music and poetry, eloquence and grace, the strong-minded, hard-featured fairy called Perseverance came to his christening feast, and seeing no knife and fork laid for her, doomed him to the curse of idleness. He had all the talents which enable a man to shine in society

but he had also the money-spending talent, the elegant tastes and inclinations which require some thousands a year for their sustenance. Hitherto he had lived by his wits—from hand to mouth; but for some years past he had been on the look-out for a rich wife.

He knew that Mildred Greswold was three times richer than Pamela Ramsome. The wealth of the Faussets came within the region of his knowledge; and he knew how large a fortune John Fausset had left his daughter, and how entirely that fortune was at her own disposal. He might have had Pamela for the asking; Pamela, with a paltry fifteen hundred a year; Pamela, who sang false and bored him beyond measure. The higher prize seemed impossible; but it was his nature to attempt the impossible. His belief in his own power was boundless.

“She cannot divorce her husband,” he told himself; “but he may divorce her if she should wrong him, or even seem to wrong him: and the most innocent woman may be compromised if her lover is daring and will risk much for a great *coup*, as I would.”

He thought himself very near success in these

lengthening afternoons in the beginning of February, when he was allowed to spend the lovely hour of sundown in Mrs. Greswold's *salon*, watching the sunset from the wide plate-glass window, which commanded a panorama of lake and mountain, with every exquisite change from concentrated light to suffused colour, and then to deepening purple that slowly darkened into night. It was the hour in which it was deemed dangerous to be out of doors; but it was the loveliest hour of the day or the night, and Mildred never wearied of that glorious outlook over lake and sky. She was silent for the most part at such a time, sitting in the shadow of the window-curtains, her face hidden from the other two, sitting apart from the world, thinking of the life that had been and could never be again.

Sometimes in the midst of her sad thoughts Castellani would strike a chord on the piano at the other end of the room, and then a tender strain of melody would steal out of the darkness, and that veiled tenor voice would sing some of the saddest lines of Heine, the poet of the broken heart, sadder than Byron, sadder than Musset, sad with the sadness of

one who had never known joy. Those words wedded to tenderest melody always moved Mildred Greswold to tears. Castellani saw her tears and thought they were given to him; such tears as yielding virtue gives to the tempter. He knew the power of his voice, the fascination of music for those in whom the love of music is a part of their being. He could not foresee the possibility of failure. He was already admitted to that kind of intimacy which is the first stage of success. He was an almost daily visitor; he came upon the two ladies in their walks and drives, and contrived, unbidden, to make himself their companion; he chose the books that both were to read, and made himself useful in getting library parcels sent from Milan or Paris. He contrived to make himself indispensable, or at least thought himself so. Pamela's eagerness filled up all the gaps; she was so full of talk and vivacity that it was not easy to be sure about the sentiments of her more silent companion; but César Castellani's vanity was the key with which he read Mildred's character and feelings.

"She is a sphinx," he told himself; "but I think I can solve her mystery. The magnetic power

of such a love as mine must draw her to me sooner or later."

Mr. Castellani had a profound belief in his own magnetism. That word magnetic had a large place in his particular creed. He talked of certain fascinating women—generally a little *passée*—as "magnetic." He prided himself upon being a magnetic man.

While César Castellani flattered himself that he was on the threshold of success, Mildred Greswold was deliberating how best to escape from him and his society for ever. Had she been alone there need have been no difficulty; but she saw Pamela's happiness involved in his presence, she saw the fresh young cheek pale at the thought of separation, and she was perplexed how to act for the best. Had Pamela been her daughter she could not have considered her feelings more tenderly. She told herself that Mr. Castellani would be a very bad match for Miss Ransome; yet when she saw the girl's face grow radiant at the sound of his footsteps, when she watched her dulness in his absence, that everlasting air of waiting for somebody which marks the girl

who is in love, she found herself hoping that the Italian would make a formal proposal, and she was inclined to meet him half-way.

But the new year was six weeks old, and he had not even hinted at matrimonial intentions, so Mildred felt constrained to speak plainly.

“My dearest Pamela, we are drifting into a very uncomfortable position with Mr. Castellani,” she began gently. “He comes here day after day as if he were your *fiancé*, and yet he has said nothing definite.”

Pamela grew crimson at this attack, and her hands began to tremble over her crewel-work, though she tried to go on working.

“I respect him all the more for being in no haste to declare himself, Aunt Mildred,” she said, rather angrily. “If he were the kind of adventurer you once thought him, he would have made me an offer ages ago. Why should he not come to see us? I’m sure he’s very amusing and very useful. Even you seem interested in him and cheered by him. Why should he not come? We have no one’s opinion to study in a foreign hotel.”

“I don’t know about that, dear. People always hear about things; and it might injure you by and by in society to have your name associated with Mr. Castellani.”

“I am sure I should be very proud of it,” retorted Pamela; “very proud to have my name associated with genius.”

“And you really, honestly believe you could be happy as his wife, Pamela?” asked Mildred gravely.

“I know that I ~~can~~ never be happy with any one else. I don’t consider myself particularly clever, aunt, but I believe I have the artistic temperament. Life without art would be a howling wilderness for me.”

“Life means a long time, dear. Think what a difference it must make whether you lead it with a good or a bad man!”

“All the goodness in the world would not make me happy with a husband who was not musical; not John Howard, nor John Wesley, nor John Bunyan, nor any of your model Johns. John Milton *was*,” added Pamela rather vaguely, “and handsome into the bargain; but I’m afraid he was a little *dry*.”

“Promise me at least this much, Pamela. First, that you will take no step without your uncle’s knowledge and advice ; and next, that if ever you marry Mr. Castellani, you will have your fortune strictly settled upon yourself.”

“O, aunt, how sordid ! But perhaps it would be best. If I had the money, I should give it all to him : but if he had the money, with his artistic temperament he would be sure to lavish it all upon other people. He would not be able to pass a picturesque beggar without emptying his pockets. Do **you** remember how he was impressed by the four old men on the church steps the other day ?”

“Yes, but I don’t think he gave them anything.”

“Not while we were with him ; but you may be sure he did afterwards.”

After this conversation Mrs. Greswold made up her mind on two points. She would arrange for a prompt departure to Venice or Naples, whichever might be advised for the spring season ; and she would sound Mr. Castellani as to his intentions. It was not fair to Pamela that she should be kept in the dark any longer, that the gentleman should be

allowed to sing duets with her, and advise her studies, and join her in her walks, and yet give no definite expression to his regard.

Mildred tried to think the best of him as a suitor for her husband's niece. She knew that he was clever; she knew that he was fairly well born. On his mother's side he sprang from the respectable commercial classes; on his father's side he belonged to the art-world. There was nothing debasing in such a lineage. From neither her friend Mrs. Tomkison nor from Miss Fausset had she heard anything to his discredit; and both those ladies had known him long. There could therefore be no objection on the score of character. Pamela ought to make a much better marriage in the way of means and position; but those excellent and well-chosen alliances dictated by the wisdom of friends are sometimes known to result in evil; and, in a word, why should not Pamela be happy in her own way?

Having thus reasoned with herself, Mildred watched for an opportunity to speak to Castellani. She had not long to wait. He called rather earlier than usual one afternoon, when Pamela had gone out

for a mountain ramble with her dog and her maid, to search for those doubly precious flowers which bloom with the first breath of spring. Castellani had seen the young lady leave the hotel soon after the midday meal, armed with her alpenstock, and accompanied by her attendant carrying a basket. She had fondly hoped that he would offer to join her expedition, to dig out delicate ferns from sheltered recesses, to hunt for mountain hyacinths and many-hued anemones ; but he observed her departure *perdu* behind a window-curtain in the reading-room, and half-an-hour afterwards he was ushered into Mrs. Greswold's drawing-room.

“ I feared you were ill,” he said, “ as I saw Miss Ransome excursionising without you.”

“ I have a slight headache, and felt more inclined for a book than for a long walk. Why did you not go with Pamela ? I daresay she would have been glad of your company. Peterson is not a lively companion for a mountain ramble.”

“ Poor Miss Ransome ! How sad to be a young English Mees, and to have to be chaperoned by a person like Peterson !” said Castellani, with a care-

less shrug. "No, I had no inclination to join in the anemone hunt. Miss Ransome told me yesterday what she was going to do. I have no passion for wild flowers or romantic walks."

"But you seem to have a great liking for Miss Ransome's society," replied Mildred gravely. "You have cultivated it very assiduously since you came here, and I think I may be excused for fancying that you came to Pallanza on her account."

"You may be excused for thinking anything wild and improbable, because you are a woman and wilfully blind," he answered, drawing his chair a little nearer to hers, and lowering his voice with a touch of tenderness. "But surely—surely you cannot think that I came to Pallanza on Miss Ransome's account?"

"I might not have thought so had you been a less frequent visitor in this room, where you have come—pardon me for saying so—very much of your own accord. I don't think it was quite delicate or honourable to come here so often, to be so continually in the society of a frank, impressionable girl,

unless you had some deeper feeling for her than casual admiration."

"Mrs. Greswold, upon my honour I have never in the whole course of my acquaintance with Miss Ransome by one word or tone implied any warmer feeling than that which you call casual admiration."

"And you are not attached to her? you do not cherish the hope of winning her for your wife?" asked Mildred seriously, looking at him with earnest eyes.

That calm, grave look chilled him to the core of his heart. His brow flushed, his eyes grew dark and troubled. He felt as if the crisis of his life were approaching, and augury was unfavourable.

"I have never cherished any such hope; I never shall."

"Then why have you come here so continually?"

"For God's sake, do not ask me that question! The time has not come."

"Yes, Mr. Castellani, the time has come. The question should have been asked sooner. You have compromised Miss Ransome by your meaningless assiduities. You have compromised me; for I

ought to have taken better care of her than to allow an acquaintance of so ambiguous a character. But I am very glad that I have spoken, and that you have replied plainly. From to-day your visits must cease. We shall go to the south of Italy in a few days. Let me beg that you will not happen to be travelling in the same direction."

Mildred was deeply indignant. She had cheapened her husband's niece—Randolph Ransome's co-heiress—a girl whom half the young men in London would have considered a prize in the matrimonial market: and this man, who had haunted her at home and abroad for the last seven or eight weeks, dared now to tell her that his attentions were motiveless so far as her niece was concerned.

"O, Mildred, do not banish me!" he cried passionately. "You must have understood. You must know that it is you, and you only, for whom I care; you whose presence makes life lovely for me, in whose absence I am lost and wretched. You have wrung my secret from me. I did not mean to offend. I would have respected your strange widowhood. I would have waited half a lifetime. Only to see you,

to be near you—your slave, your proud, too happy slave. That was all I would have asked. Why may that not be? Why may I not come and go, like the summer wind that breathes round you, like the flowers that look in at your window—faithful as your dog, patient as old Time? Why may it not be, Mildred?”

She stood up suddenly before him, white to the lips, and with cold contempt in those eyes which he had seen so lovely with the light of affection when they had looked at her husband. She looked at him unfalteringly, as she might have looked at a worm. Anger had made her pale, but that was all.

“You must have had a strange experience of women before you would dare to talk to any honest woman in such a strain as this, Mr. Castellani,” she said. “I will not lower myself so far as to tell you what I think of your conduct. Miss Ransome shall know the kind of person whose society she has endured. I must beg that you will consider yourself as much a stranger to her as to me from to-day.”

She moved towards the bell, but he intercepted her.

“You are very cruel,” he said; “but the day will come when you will be sorry that you rejected the most devoted love that was ever offered to woman, in order to be true to broken bonds.”

“They are not broken. They will hold me to my dying hour.”

“Yes, to a madman and a murderer.”

CHAPTER VIII.

NOT PROVEN.

MILDRED stood speechless for some moments after those words of Castellani's, looking at him with kindling eyes.

"How dare you?" she cried at last. "How dare you accuse my husband—the noblest of men?"

"The noblest of men do strange things sometimes upon an evil impulse, and when they are not quite right here," touching his forehead.

"My husband, George Greswold, is too high a mark for your malignity. Do you think you can make me believe evil of him after fourteen years of married life? His intellect is the clearest and the soundest I have ever found in man or woman. You can no more shake my faith in his power of brain than in his goodness of heart."

"Perhaps not. The George Greswold you know is a gentleman of commanding intellect and unblem-

ished character. But the George Ransome whom I knew seventeen years ago was a gentleman who was shrewdly suspected of having made away with his wife; and who was confined in a public asylum in the environs of Nice as a dangerous lunatic. If you doubt these facts, you have only to go to Nice, or to St. Jean, where Mr. Ransome and his wife lived for some time in a turtle-dove retirement, which ended tragically. Seventeen years does not obliterate the evidence of such a tragedy as that in which your husband was chief actor."

"I do not believe one word—and I hope I may never hear your voice again," said Mildred, with her hand on the electric bell.

She did not remove her hand till her servant, the courier, opened the door. A look told him his duty. Castellani took up his hat without a word; and Albrecht deferentially attended him to the landing, and politely whistled for the lift to convey him to the vestibule below.

Castellani made the descent, feeling like Lucifer when he fell from heaven.

"Too soon!" he muttered to himself. "She

took the cards out of my hands—she forced my play, and spoiled my game. But I have given her something to think about. She will not forget to-day's interview in a hurry."

Albrecht, the handiest of men, was standing beside him, working the lift.

"Where is your next move to be, Albrecht?" he asked in German.

The noble-born lady had not yet decided, Albrecht told him; but he thought the move would be either to Venice or to Posilippo.

"If I pretended to be a prophet, Albrecht, I should tell thee that the honourable lady will go to neither Venice nor Posilippo; but that thy next move will be to the Riviera, perhaps to Nice."

Albrecht shrugged his shoulders in polite indifference.

"Look here, my friend, come thou to me when madame gives the order for Nice, and I will give thee a louis for assuring me that I prophesied right," said Castellani, as he stepped out of the lift.

Mildred walked up and down the room, trying to

control the confusion of her thoughts, trying to reason calmly upon that hideous accusation which she had affected to despise, but which yet had struck terror to her soul. Would he dare to bring such a charge—villain and traitor as he was—if there were not some ground for the accusation, some glimmer of truth amidst a cloud of falsehood?

And her husband's manner: his refusal to tell her the history of his first marriage; his reticence, his secrecy—reticence so out of harmony with his boldly truthful nature; the gloom upon his face when she forced him to speak of that past life: all these things came back upon her with appalling force, and even trifles assumed a direful significance.

“O, my beloved! *what* was that dark story, and why did you leave me to hear it from such false lips as those?”

And then with passionate tears she thought how easy it would have been to forgive and pity even a tale of guilt—unpremeditated guilt, doubtless, fatality rather than crime—if her husband had laid his weary head upon her breast and told her all; holding back nothing; confident in the strength of a great

love to understand and to pardon. How much easier would it have been to bear the burden of a guilty secret, so shared, in the supreme trustfulness of her husband's love! How light a burden compared with this which was laid upon her! this horror of groping backward into the black night of the past.

"I must know the worst," she said to herself; "I will test that scoundrel's accusation. I must know all. I will take no step to injure my dear love. I will seek no help, trust no friend. I must act alone."

Then came a more agonising thought of the hapless wife—the victim.

"My sister! What was your fate? I *must* know."

Her thoughts came back always to that point—"I must know all."

She recalled the image of that unacknowledged sister, the face bending over her bed when she started up out of a feverish dream, frightened and in tears, to take instant comfort from that loving presence, to fling her arms round Fay's neck, and nestle upon her bosom. Never had that sisterly love failed her.

The quiet watcher was always near. A sigh, a faint little murmur, and the volunteer nurse was at her side. Often on waking she had found Fay sitting by her bed, in the dead of the night, motionless and watchful, sleepless from loving care.

Her love for Fay had been one of the strongest feelings of her life. She, who had been ever dutiful to the frivolous, capricious mother, had yet unconsciously given a stronger affection to the companion who had loved her with an unselfish love, which the mother had never shown. Her regard for Fay had been the one romance of her childhood, and had continued the strongest sentiment of her mind until the hour when, for the first time, she knew the deeper love of womanhood, and gave her heart to George Greswold.

And now these two supreme affections rose up before her in dreadful conflict; and in the sister so faithfully loved and so fondly regretted she saw the victim of her still dearer husband.

Pamela's footsteps and Pamela's voice in the corridor startled her in the midst of those dark thoughts. She hurriedly withdrew to her own

room, where the maid Louisa was sitting, intent upon one of those infinitesimal repairs which served as an excuse for her existence.

“Go and tell Miss Ransome that I cannot dine with her. My headache is worse than it was when she went out. Ask her to excuse me.”

Louisa obeyed, and Mildred locked the door upon her grief. She sat all through the long evening brooding over the past and the future, impatient to know the worst.

She was on her way to Genoa with Pamela and their attendants before the following noon. Albrecht, the courier, had scarcely time to claim the promised coin from Mr. Castellani.

Miss Ransome repined at this sudden departure.

“Just as we were going to be engaged,” she sobbed, when she and Mildred were alone in a railway compartment. “It is really unkind of you to whisk one off in such a way, aunt.”

“My dear Pamela, you have had a lucky escape; and I hope you will never mention Mr. Castellani’s name again. He is an utterly bad man.”

“How cruel to say such a thing!—behind his back, too! What has he done that is bad, I should like to know?”

“I cannot enter into details; but I can tell you one thing, Pamela: he has never had any idea of asking you to be his wife. He told me that in the plainest language.”

“Do you mean to say that you questioned him about his feelings—for me?”

“I did what I felt was my duty, Pamela—my duty to you and to your uncle.”

“Duty!” ejaculated Pamela, with such an air that Box began to growl, imagining his mistress in want of protection. “Duty! It is the most hateful word in the whole of the English language. You asked him when he was going to propose to me—you lowered and humiliated me beyond all that words can say—you—you spoilt everything.”

“Pamela, is this reasonable or just?”

“To be asked when he was going to propose to a girl—with his artistic temperament—the very thing to disgust him,” said Pamela, in a series of

gasps. "If you had WANTED to part us for ever you could not have gone to work better."

"Whatever I wanted yesterday, I am quite clear about my feelings to-day, Pamela. It is my earnest hope that you and Mr. Castellani will never meet again."

"You are very cruel, then—heartless—inhuman. Because *you* have done with love—because you have left my poor Uncle George—Heaven alone knows why—is no one else to be happy?"

"You could not be happy with César Castellani, Pamela. Happiness does not lie that way. I tell you again, he is a bad man."

"And I tell you again I don't believe you. In what way is he bad? Does he rob, murder, forge, set fire to people's houses? What has he done that is bad?"

"He has traduced your uncle—to me, his wife."

Pamela's countenance fell.

"You—you may have misunderstood him," she faltered.

"No, there was no possibility of mistake. He landered my husband. He let me see in the plain-

est way that he had no real regard for you, that he did not care how far his frequent visits compromised either you or me. He is utterly base, Pamela—a man without rectitude or conscience. He would have clung to us like some poisonous burr if I had not shaken him off. My dear, dear child,” said Mildred, putting her arm round Pamela’s reluctant waist, and drawing [the girlish figure nearer to her side, to the relief of Box, who leaped upon their shoulders and licked their faces in a rapture of sympathetic feeling; “my dear, you have been treated very badly, but I am not to blame. You have had a lucky escape, Pamela. Why be angry about it?”

“It is all very well to talk like that,” sighed the girl, wrinkling her white forehead in painful perplexity. “He was my day-dream. One cannot renounce one’s day-dream at a moment’s warning. If you knew the castles I have built—a life spent with him—a life devoted to the cultivation of art! He would have *made* my voice; and we could have had a flat in Queen Anne’s Mansions, and a brougham and victoria, and lived within our

income," concluded Pamela, following her own train of thought.

"My dearest, there are so many worthier to share your life. You will have new day-dreams."

"Perhaps when I am sixty. It will take me a lifetime to forget him. Do you think I could marry a country bumpkin, or any one who was not artistic?"

"You shall not be asked to marry a rustic. The artistic temperament is common enough nowadays. Almost every one is artistic."

Pamela shrugged her shoulders petulantly, and turned to the window in token that she had said her say. She grieved like a child who has been disappointed of some jaunt looked forward to for long days of expectation. She tried to think herself ill-used by her uncle's wife; and yet that common sense of which she possessed a considerable share told her that she had only herself to blame. She had chosen to fall in love with a showy, versatile adventurer, without waiting for evidence that he cared for her. Proud in the strength of her position as an independent young woman with a handsome fortune and a fairly attractive person, she had

imagined that Mr. Castellani could look no higher, hope for nothing better than to obtain her hand and heart. She had ascribed his reticence to delicacy. She had accepted his frequent visits as an evidence of his attachment and of his ulterior views.

And now she sat in a sulky attitude, coiled up in a corner of the carriage, with her face to the window, meditating upon her fool's paradise. For seven happy weeks she had seen the man she admired almost daily ; and her own intense sympathy with him had made her imagine an equal sympathy on his part. When their hands touched the thrilling vibration seemed mutual ; and yet it had been on her side only, poor fool, she told herself now, abased in her own self-consciousness, drinking the cup of humiliation to the dregs.

He had slandered her uncle—yes, that was villany, that was iniquity. She began to think that he was utterly black. She remembered how coldly cruel he had been about the anemone hunt yesterday ; how deaf to her girlish hints ; never offering his company : colder, crueller than marble. She felt as if she had squandered her love upon Satan. Yet she

was not the less angry with Mildred. That kind of interference was unpardonable.

She arrived at Genoa worn out with a fatiguing journey, and in a worse temper than she had ever sustained for so long a period, she whose worst tempers hitherto had been like April showers. Mildred had reciprocated her silence, and Box had been the only animated passenger.

The clever courier had made all his arrangements by telegraph : they spent a night at Genoa ; drove round the city next morning ; explored churches, palaces, and picture-galleries ; and went on to Nice in the afternoon. They arrived at the great bustling station late in the evening, and were driven to one of the hotels on the Promenade des Anglais, where all preparations had been made for their reception : a glowing hearth in a spacious drawing-room opening on to a balcony, lamps and candles lighted, roses on all the tables, maid and man on the alert to receive travellers of distinction. So far as a place which is not home can put on an aspect of homeliness the hotel had succeeded ; but Mildred looked round upon the white and gold walls, and the satin

fauteuils, with an aching heart, remembering those old rooms at Enderby, and the familiar presence that had first made them dear to her, before the habit of years had made those inanimate things a part of her life.

She was at Nice ; she had taken the slanderer's advice, and had gone to the city by the sea, to try and trace out for herself the mystery of the past, to violate her husband's secret, kept so long and so closely, only to rise up after years of happiness, like a murdered corpse exhumed from a forgotten grave.

She was here, on the scene of her husband's first marriage, and for three or four days she walked and drove about the strange busy place aimlessly, hopelessly, no nearer the knowledge of that dark history than she had been at Enderby Manor. Not for worlds would she injure the man she loved. She wanted to know all ; but the knowledge must be obtained in such a way as could not harm him. This necessitated diplomacy, which was foreign to her nature, and patience, in which womanly quality she excelled. She had learnt patience in her tender

ministrations to a fretful invalid, during those sad slow years in which pretty Mrs. Fausset had faded into the grave. Yes, she had learnt to be patient, and to submit to sorrow. She knew how to wait.

The place, delightful as it was in the early spring weather, possessed no charms for her. Its gaiety and movement jarred upon her. The sunsets were as lovely here as at Pallanza, and her only pleasure was to watch that ever-varying splendour of declining day behind the long dark promontory of Antibes ; or to see the morning dawn in a flush of colour above the white lighthouse yonder at the point of the peninsula of St. Jean. It was in the village of St. Jean that George Greswold had lived with his first wife—with Fay. The bright face, pale, yet brilliant, a face in which light took the place of colour ; the eager eyes ; the small sharp features and thin sarcastic lips, rose up before her with the thought of that union. He must have loved her. She was so bright, so interesting, so full of vivid fancies and changeful emotions. To this hour Mildred remembered her fascination, her power over a child's heart.

Pamela was dull and out of spirits. Not all the Tauchnitz novels in Galignani's shop could interest her. She pronounced Nice distinctly inferior to Brighton ; declined even the distraction of the opera.

"Music would only make me miserable," she exclaimed petulantly. "I wish I might never hear any again. That hateful band in the gardens tortures me every morning."

This was not hopeful. Mildred was sorry for her, but too deeply absorbed by her own griefs to be altogether sympathetic.

"She will find some one else to admire before long," she thought somewhat bitterly. "Girls who fall in love so easily are easily consoled."

She had been at Nice more than a week, and had made no effort—yearning to know more—to know all—yet dreading every new revelation. She had to goad herself to action, to struggle against the weight of a great fear—the fear that she might find the slanderer's accusations confirmed instead of being refuted.

Her first step was a very simple one, easy enough from a social point of view. Among old

Lady Castle-Connell's intimate friends had been a certain Irish chieftain called The O'Labacolly. The O'Labacolly's daughter had been one of the reigning beauties of Dublin Castle, had appeared for three seasons in London with considerable *éclat*, and in due course had married a Scotch peer, who was lord of an extensive territory in the Highlands, strictly entailed, and of a more profitable estate in the neighbourhood of Glasgow at his own disposal. Lord Lochinvar had been laid at rest in the sepulchre of his forebears, and Lady Lochinvar was a rich widow, still handsome, and still young enough to enjoy all the pleasures of society. She had no children of her own, but she had a favourite nephew, whom she had adopted, and who acted as her escort in her travels, which were extensive, and as her steward in the management of the Glasgow property, which had been settled upon her at her marriage. The Highland territory had gone with the title to a distant cousin of Lady Lochinvar's husband.

Mildred remembered that Castellani had spoken of meeting Mr. Ransome and his wife at Lady Lochinvar's palace at Nice. Her first step, there-

fore, was to make herself known to Lady Lochinvar, who had wintered in this fair white city ever since she came there as a young widow twenty years ago, and had bought for herself a fantastic villa, built early in the century by an Italian prince, on the crest of a hill commanding the harbour.

With this view she wrote to Lady Lochinvar, recalling the old friendship between The O'Labacolly and Lady Castle-Connell, and introducing herself on the strength of that friendship. Lady Lochinvar responded with Hibernian warmth. She called at the Hôtel Westminster that afternoon, and not finding Mrs. Greswold at home, left a note inviting her to lunch at the Palais Montano next day.

Mildred promptly accepted the invitation. She was anxious to be alone with Lady Lochinvar, and there seemed a better chance of a *tête-à-tête* at the lady's house than at the hotel, where it would have been difficult to exclude Pamela. She drove to that fair hill on the eastward side of the city, turning her back upon the quaint old Italian town, with its narrow streets of tall white houses with red roofs,

and its Cathedral dome embedded in the midst, the red and yellow tiles glistening in the sunlight. The two small horses toiled slowly up the height with the great lumbering landau, carrying Mildred nearer and nearer to the bright blue sky and the snow-line glittering on the edge of the distant hills. They went past villas and flower-gardens, hedges of yellow roses and hedges of coral-hued geranium, cactus and agave, palms and orange-trees, shining majolica tubs and white marble balustrades, statues and fountains, oriel windows and Italian cupolas, turrets and towers of every order; while the sapphire sea dropped lower and lower beneath the chalky winding road, as the jutting promontory that shelters Villefranche from the east came nearer and nearer above the blue.

The Italian prince who built the Palais Montano had aspired after Oriental rather than classic beauty. His house was long and low, with two ranges of Moorish windows, and a dome at each end. There was an open loggia on the first floor, with a balustrade of white and coloured marble; there was a gallery above the spacious tessellated hall, screened

by carved sandal-wood lattices, behind which the beauties of a harem might be supposed to watch the entrances and exits below. The house was fantastic, but fascinating. The garden was the growth of more than half a century, and was supremely beautiful.

Lady Lochinvar received the stranger with a cordiality which would have set Mildred thoroughly at her ease under happier circumstances. As it was, she was too completely engrossed by the object of her visit to feel any of that shyness which a person of retiring disposition might experience on such an occasion. She was grave and preoccupied, and it was with an effort that she responded to Lady Lochinvar's allusions to the past.

"Your mother and I were girls together," said the Dowager, "at dear old Castle-Connell. My father's place was within a drive of the Castle, but away from the river, and one of my first pleasant memories is of your grandfather's gardens and the broad, bright Shannon. What a river! When I look at our stony torrent-beds here, and remember that glorious Shannon!"

“ Yet you like Nice better than county Limerick ? ”

“ Of course I do, my dear Mrs. Greswold. Ireland is a delicious country—to remember. I saw a good deal of your mother in London before his lordship’s death, but after I became a widow, I went very little into English society. I had found English people so narrow-minded. I only endured them for Lochinvar’s sake ; and after his death I became a rover. I have an apartment in the Champs Elysées and a *pied-à-terre* in Rome ; and now and then, when I want to drink a draught of commonplace, when I want to know what the hard-headed, practical British intellect is making of the world in general, I give myself a fortnight at Claridge’s. A fortnight is always enough. So, you see, I have had no opportunity of looking up old friends.”

“ I never remember seeing you in Upper Parchment Street,” said Mildred.

“ My dear, you were a baby at the time I knew your mother. I think you were just able to toddle across the drawing-room the day I bade her good-

bye, before I went to Scotland with Lochinvar—our last journey, poor dear man. He died the following winter.”

The butler announced luncheon, and they went into an ideal dining-room, purely Oriental, with hangings of a dull pale pink damask interwoven with lustreless gold, its only ornaments old Rhodes salvers shining with prismatic hues, its furniture of cedar inlaid with ivory.

“I am quite alone to-day,” said Lady Lochinvar. “My nephew is driving to Monte Carlo by the Cornice, and will not be back till dinner-time.”

“I am very glad to be alone with you, Lady Lochinvar. I feel myself bound to tell you that I had an *arrière-pensée* in seeking your acquaintance, pleasant as it is to me to meet any friend of my mother’s youth.”

Lady Lochinvar looked surprised, and even a little suspicious. She began to fear some uncomfortable story. This sad-looking woman—such a beautiful face, but with such unmistakable signs of unhappiness. A runaway wife, perhaps; a poor creature who had fallen into disgrace, and who

wanted Lady Lochinvar's help to regain her position, or face her calumniators. Some awkward business, no doubt. Lady Lochinvar was generous to a fault, but she liked showing kindness to happy people, she wanted smiling faces and serenity about her. She had never known any troubles of her own, worse than losing the husband whom she had married for his wealth and position, and saw no reason why she should be plagued with the troubles of other people. Her handsome countenance hardened ever so little as she answered,

“If there is any small matter in which I can be of service to you—” she began.

“It is not a small matter; it is a great matter—to—to a friend of mine,” interrupted Mildred, faltering a little in her first attempt at dissimulation.

Lady Lochinvar breathed more freely.

“I shall be charmed to help your friend if I can.”

The butler came in and out, assisted by another servant, as the conversation went on; but as his mistress spoke to him and to his subordinate only in Italian, Mildred concluded they understood very

little English, and did not concern herself about their presence.

“I want you to help me with your recollection of the past, Lady Lochinvar. You were at Nice seventeen years ago, I believe?”

“Between November and April, yes. I have spent those months here for the last twenty years.”

“You remember a Mr. Ransome and his wife, seventeen years ago?”

“Yes, I remember them distinctly. I cannot help remembering them.”

“Have you ever met Mr. Ransome since that time?”

“Never.”

“And you have not heard anything about him?”

“No, I have never heard of him since he left the asylum on the road to St. André. Good heavens, Mrs. Greswold, how white you have turned! Pietro, some brandy this moment—”

“No, no! I am quite well—only a little shocked, that is all. I had heard that Mr. Ransome was out of his mind at one time, but I did not be-

lieve my informant. It is really true, then? He was once mad?"

"Yes, he was mad; unless it was all a sham, a clever assumption."

"Why should he have assumed madness?"

Lady Lochinvar shrugged her portly shoulders, and lifted her finely-arched eyebrows with a little foreign air which had grown upon her in foreign society.

"To escape from a very awkward dilemma. He was arrested on suspicion of having killed his wife. The evidence against him was weak, but the circumstances of the poor thing's death were very suspicious."

"How did she die?"

"She threw herself—or she was thrown—from a cliff on the other side of the promontory which you may see from that window."

Mildred was silent for some moments, while her breath came and went in hurried gasps.

"Might she not have fallen accidentally?" she faltered.

"That would have been hardly possible. It was

a place where she had been in the habit of walking for weeks — a path which anybody might walk upon in the daylight without the slightest danger. And the calamity happened in broad day. She could not have fallen accidentally. Either she threw herself over, or he pushed her over in a moment of ungovernable anger. She was a very provoking woman, and had a tongue which might goad a man to fury. I saw a good deal of her the winter before her death. She was remarkably clever, and she amused me. I had a kind of liking for her, and I used to let her tell me her troubles.”

“What kind of troubles?”

“O, they all began and ended in one subject. She was jealous, intolerably jealous, of her husband; suspected him of inconstancy to herself if he was commonly civil to a handsome woman. She watched him like a lynx, and did her utmost to make his life a burden to him, yet loved him passionately all the time in her vehement, wrong-headed manner.”

“Poor girl! poor girl!” murmured Mildred, with a stifled sob, and then she asked with intense earnestness, “but, Lady Lochinvar, you who knew

George Ransome, surely *you* never suspected him of murder?"

"I don't know, Mrs. Greswold. I believe he was a gentleman, and a man of an open, generous nature; but, upon my word, I should be sorry to pledge myself to a positive belief in his innocence as to his wife's death. Who can tell what a man might do, harassed and tormented as that man may have been by that woman's tongue? I know what pestilential things she could say—what scorpions and adders dropped out of her mouth when she was in her jealous fits—and she may have gone just one step too far—walking by his side upon that narrow path—and he may have turned upon her, exasperated to madness, and—one push—and the thing was done. The edge of a cliff must be an awful temptation under such circumstances," added Lady Lochinvar solemnly. "I am sure I would not answer for myself in such a situation."

"I will answer for *him*," said Mildred firmly.

"You know him, then?"

"Yes, I know him."

“Where is he? What is he doing? Has he prospered in life?”

“Yes, and no. He was a happy man—or seemed to be happy—for thirteen years of married life; and then God’s hand was stretched out to afflict him, and his only child was snatched away.”

“He married again, then?”

“Yes, he married a second wife fourteen years ago. Forgive me, Lady Lochinvar, for having suppressed the truth till now. I wanted you to answer me more freely than you might have done had you known all. George Ransome is my husband; he assumed the name of Greswold when he succeeded to his mother’s property.”

“Then Mr. Greswold, your husband, is my old acquaintance. Is he with you here?”

“No. I have left him—perhaps for ever.”

“On account of that past story?”

“No, for another reason, which is my sad secret, and his—a family secret. It involves no blame to him or me. It is a dismal fatality which parts us. You cannot suppose, Lady Lochinvar, that *I* could think my husband a murderer?”

“A murderer? No! I do not believe any one ever thought him guilty of deliberate murder—but that he lost his temper with that unhappy girl, spurned her from him, flung her over the edge of the cliff—”

“O, no, no, no! it is not possible! I know him too well. He is not capable of a brutal act even under the utmost exasperation. No irritation, no sense of injury, could bring about such a change in his nature. Think, Lady Lochinvar. I have been his wife for fourteen years. I must know what his character is like.”

“You know what he is in happy circumstances, with an attached and confiding wife. You cannot imagine him goaded to madness by an unreasonable, hot-headed woman. You remember he was mad for half a year after his wife’s death. There must have been some sufficient reason for his madness.”

“His wife’s wretched death, and the fact that he was accused of having murdered her, were enough to make him mad.”

And then Mildred remembered how she had tortured her husband by her persistent questions about

that terrible past; how, in her jealousy of an unknown rival, she, too, had goaded him almost as that first wife had goaded him. She recalled the look of pain, the mute protest against her cruelty, and she hated herself for the selfishness of her love.

Lady Lochinvar was kind and sympathetic. She was not angry at the trap that had been set for her.

“I can understand,” she said. “You wanted to know the worst, and you felt that I should be reticent if I knew you were Mr. Ransome’s wife. Well, I have said all the evil I can say about him. Remember I know nothing except what other people thought and suspected. There was an inquiry about the poor thing’s death before the Juge d’Instruction at Villefranche, and Mr. Ransome was kept in prison between the first and second inquiry, and then it was discovered that the poor fellow had gone off his head, and he was taken to the asylum. He had no relations in the neighbourhood, nobody interested in looking after him. His acquaintances in Nice knew very little about him or his wife, even when they were living at an hotel on the Promenade des Anglais and going into society. After they left Nice

they lived in seclusion at St. Jean, and avoided all their acquaintance. Mrs. Ransome's health was a reason for retirement ; but it may not have been the only reason. There was no one, therefore, to look after the poor man in his misfortunes. He was just hustled away to the madhouse—the inquiry fell through for want of evidence—and for six months George Ransome was buried alive. I was in Paris at the time, and only heard the story when I came back to Nice in the following November. Nobody could tell me what had become of Mr. Ransome, and it was only by accident that I heard of his confinement in the asylum some time after he had been released as a sane man.”

“Did his wife ever talk to you of her own history?”

“Never. She was very fond of talking to me about her husband's supposed inconstancy and the mistake she had made in marrying a man who had never cared for her ; but about her own people and her own antecedents she was silent as the grave. In a place like Nice, where everybody is idle, there is sure to be a good deal of gossip, and we all had our

own ideas about Mrs. Ransome. We put her down as the natural daughter of some person of importance, or, at any rate, of good means. She had her own fortune, and was entirely independent of her husband, who was not a rich man at that time."

"No, it was his mother's death that made him rich. But you did not think he had married for money?"

"No; our theory was that he had been worried into marrying her. We thought the lady had thrown herself at his head, and that all her unhappiness sprang from her knowledge that she had in a measure forced him to marry her."

"Do you remember the name of the house at St. Jean where they lived when they left Nice?"

"Yes, I called there once, but as Mrs. Ransome never returned my call, I concluded that they wished to drop their Nice acquaintance, and I heard afterwards that they were living like hermits in a cave. The house is a low white villa, spread out along the edge of a grassy ridge, with a broad stone terrace on one side and a garden and orchard on the other. It is called *Le Bout du Monde*."

“I am very grateful to you, Lady Lochinvar, for having been frank with me. I will go and look at the house where they lived. I may find some one, perhaps, who knew them.”

“You want to make further inquiries?”

“I want to find some one who is as convinced of my husband’s guiltlessness as I am.”

“That will be difficult. There was very little evidence for or against him. The husband and wife went out to walk together one April afternoon. They left the house in peace and amity, as it seemed to their servants; but some ladies who met and talked to them an hour afterwards thought by Mrs. Ransome’s manner that she was on bad terms with her husband. When she was next seen she was lying at the foot of a cliff, dead. That is all that is known of the tragedy. You could hardly hang a man or acquit him upon such evidence. It is a case of not proven.”

CHAPTER IX.

LOOKING BACK.

LADY LOCHINVAR offered to drive Mrs. Greswold to St. Jean that afternoon. Her villa was half-way between Nice and Villefranche, and half-an-hour's drive would have taken them to the Bout du Monde; but Mildred preferred to make her explorations alone. There was too much heart-ache in such an investigation to admit of sympathy or companionship.

“You are all goodness to me, dear Lady Lochinvar,” she said, “and I may come to you again for help before I have done; but I would rather visit the scene of my husband's tragedy alone—quite alone. You cannot tell how sad the story is to me, even apart from my love for him. I may be able to confide in you more fully some day, perhaps.”

Lady Lochinvar kissed her at parting. She did not care for commonplace troubles; she could not sympathise with stupid family quarrels or shortness

of money, or any of the vulgar trivialities about which people worry their friends; but a romantic sorrow, a tragedy with a touch of mystery in it, was full of interest for her. And then, Mildred was a graceful sufferer, not hysterical or tiresome in any way.

"I will do anything in the world that I can for you," she said.

"Will you let me bring my husband's niece to see you?" asked Mildred. "She has a dull time with me, poor girl, and I think you would like her."

"She shall come to me this evening, if she has nothing better to do," said Lady Lochinvar. "I am fond of young people, and will do my best to amuse her. I will send my carriage for her at half-past seven."

"That is more than kind. I shall be glad for the poor girl to get a glimpse of something brighter than our perpetual *tête-à-tête*. But there is one thing I ought to speak about before you see her. I think you know something of an Italian called Castellani, a man who is both musical and literary."

“Yes, I have heard of Mr. Castellani’s growing fame. He is the author of that delightful story *Nepenthe*, is he not? I knew him years ago—it was in the same winter we have been talking about. He used to come to my parties. Do you know him?”

“He has been a visitor at Enderby—my husband’s house—and I have seen something of him in Italy of late. I am sorry to say he has made a very strong impression upon my niece’s heart—or upon her imagination—but as I know him to be a worthless person, I am deeply anxious that her liking for him should —”

“Die a natural death. I understand,” interrupted Lady Lochinvar. “You may be sure I will not encourage the young lady to talk about Mr. Castellani.”

Mildred explained her responsibility with regard to Pamela and the young lady’s position, with its substantial attraction for the adventurer in search of a wife. She had deemed it her duty to confide thus much in Lady Lochinvar, lest Castellani should change his tactics, and pursue Pamela with addresses which might be only too readily accepted.

She left the Palais Montano at two o'clock, and drove round the bay to St. Jean, where the rose-hedges were in flower, and where the gardens were bright with bloom under a sky which suggested an English June.

She left the fly at the little inn where the holiday people go to eat bouillabaisse on Sundays and fête-days, but which was silent and solitary to-day, and then walked slowly along the winding road, looking for the Bout du Monde. The place was prettier and more rustic, after an almost English fashion, than any spot she had seen since she left Enderby. Villas and cottages were scattered in a desultory way upon different levels, under the shelter of precipitous cliffs, and on every bit of rising ground and in every hollow there were orange and lemon groves, with here and there a peach or a cherry in full bloom, and here and there a vivid patch of flowers, and here and there a wall covered with the glowing purple of the Bougainvilliers. Great carouba-trees rose tall and dark amidst all this brightness, and through every opening in the foliage the changeful colour of the Mediterranean shone

in the distance, like the jasper sea of the Apocalypse.

Mildred went slowly along the dusty road, looking at all the villas, lingering here and there at a garden gate, and asking any intelligent-looking person who passed to direct her to the Bout du Monde. It was not till she had made the inquiry half-a-dozen times that she obtained any information; but at last she met with a bright-faced market-woman, tramping home with empty baskets after a long morning at Nice, and white with the dust of the hill-side.

“Le Bout du Monde? But that was the villa where the poor young English lady lived whose husband threw her over the cliff,” said the woman cheerily. “The proprietor changed the name of the house next season, for fear people should fancy it was haunted if the story got about. It is called Montfleuri now.”

“Is there any one living there?” Mildred asked.

No, it was let last year to an English family. O, but an amiable family, rich, ah, but *richissime*, who had bought flowers in heaps of the speaker.

But they had left, *malheureusement*. They had returned to their property near London, a great and stupendous property in a district which the flower-woman described as le Crommu-elle Rodd. There had never been such a family in St. Jean—five English servants, three English mees who mounted on horseback daily: a benefaction for the whole village. Now, alas! there was no one living at Montfleuri but an old woman in charge.

“Could you take me to the house?” asked Mildred, opening her purse.

The woman would have been all politeness and good-nature without the stimulant offered by that open purse. She had all the southern kindness and alacrity to oblige, but when the lady dropped half-a-dozen francs into her broad brown hand she almost sank to the earth in a rapture of gratitude.

“Madame shall see the house from garret to cellar if she wishes,” she exclaimed. “I know the old woman in charge. She is as deaf as one of those stones yonder,” pointing to a block of blue-gray stone lying amidst the long rank grass upon the shelving ground between the road and the sea; “but

if madame will permit *I* will show her the house. Madame is perhaps interested in the story of that poor lady who was murdered."

"Why do you say that she was murdered?" asked Mildred indignantly. "You cannot know."

The woman shrugged her shoulders with a dubious air.

"*Mais*, madame. Nobody but the good God can know: but most of us thought that the Englishman pushed his wife over the cliff. They did not live happily together. Their cook was a cousin of mine, a young woman who went regularly to confession, and would not have spoken falsely for all the world, and she told me there was great unhappiness between them. The wife was often in tears; the husband was often angry."

"But he was never unkind. Your cousin must know that he was never unkind."

"Alas! my cousin lies in the same burial-ground yonder with the poor lady," answered the woman, pointing to the white crest of the hill above Villefranche, where the soldiers were being drilled in the dusty barrack-yard under the cloudless blue. "She

is no more here to tell the story. But no, she did not say the husband was unkind; he was grave and sad; he was not happy. Tears, tears and reproaches, sad words from her, day after day; and from him silence and gloom. Poor people like us, who work for our bread, have no leisure for that kind of unhappiness. 'I would rather stand over my *casseroles* than sit in a *salon* and cry,' said my cousin."

"It is cruel to say he caused her death, when you know he was never unkind to her," said Mildred, as they walked side by side; "a patient, forbearing husband does not become a murderer all at once."

"Ah, but continual dropping will wear a stone, madame. She may have tried him too much with her tears. He went out of his mind after her death. Would he have gone mad, do you think, if he had not been guilty?"

"He was all the more likely to go mad, knowing himself innocent, and finding himself accused of a dreadful crime."

"Well, I cannot tell; I know most of us thought he had pushed her over the cliff. I know the young man who was their gardener said if he had had a

wife with that kind of temper he would have thrown her down the well in his garden."

They were at the Villa Montfleuri by this time, a long, low white house, with a stone terrace overlooking the harbour of Villefranche. The woman opened the gate, and Mildred followed her into the garden and to the terrace upon which the principal rooms opened. There was a latticed verandah in front of the *salon* and dining-room, over which roses and geraniums were trained, and above which the purple Bougainvilliers spread its vivid bloom. The orange-trees grew thick in the orchard, and in their midst stood the stone well down which the gardener said he would have thrown a discontented wife.

The caretaker was not in the house, but all the doors were open. Mildred went from room to room. The furniture was the same as it had been seventeen years ago, the woman told Mildred—furniture of the period of the First Empire, shabby, and with the air of a house that is let to strangers year after year, and in which nobody takes any interest. The clocks on the mantelpieces were all silent, the vases were all empty: everything had a dead look. Only the

view from the windows was beautiful with an inexhaustible beauty.

Mildred lingered in the faded *salon*, looking at everything with a melancholy interest. Those two familiar figures were with her in the room. She pictured them sitting there together, yet so far apart in the bitter lack of sympathy—a wife, tormented by jealous suspicions, no less agonising because they were groundless; a husband, long-suffering, weary, with his little stock of marital love worn out under slow torture. She could see them as they might have been in those bygone years. George Greswold's dark, strong face, younger than she had ever known it; for when he first came to her father's house there had been threads of gray in his dark hair and premature lines upon the brow which told of corroding care. She could understand now how those touches of gray had come in the thick wavy hair that clustered close on the broad, strongly-marked brow.

Poor Fay! poor, loving, impulsive Fay!

Child as she had been in those old days in Parchment Street, Mildred had a vivid conception of her

young companion's character. She remembered the quick temper, the sensitive self-esteem, which had taken offence at the mere suggestion of slight; she remembered dark hours of brooding melancholy when the girl had felt the sting of her isolated position, had fancied herself a creature apart, neglected and scorned by Mrs. Fausset and her butterfly visitors. For Mildred she had been always overflowing with love, and she had never doubted the sincerity of Mildred's affection; but with all the rest of the household, with every visitor who noticed her coldly, or frankly ignored her, she was on the alert for insult and offence. Remembering all this, Mildred could fully realise Lady Lochinvar's account of that unhappy union. A woman so constituted would be satisfied with nothing less than a passionate, all-absorbing love from the man she loved.

The rooms and the garden were haunted by those mournful shades—two faces pale with pain. She, too, had suffered those sharp stings of jealousy; jealousy of a past love, jealousy of the dead; and she knew how keener than all common anguish is that agony of a woman's heart which yearns for sovereign

possession over past, present, and future in the life of the man she loves.

The market-woman sat out in the sunshine on the terrace, and waited while Mildred roamed about the garden, picturing that vanished life at every step. There was the *berceau*, the delight of a southern garden, a long, green alley, arched with osiers, over which the brown vine-branches made a network, open to the sunlight and the blue sky now, while the vine was still leafless, but in summer-time a place of coolness and whispering leaves. There was the fountain—or the place where a fountain had once been, and a stone bench beside it. They had sat there perhaps on sunny mornings, sat there and talked of their future, full of hope. They could not have been always unhappy. Fay must have had her bright hours; and then, no doubt, she was dear to him, full of a strange fascination, a creature of quick wit and vivid imagination, light and fire embodied in a fragile earthly tenement.

The sun was nearing the dark edge of the promontory when Mildred left the garden, the woman accompanying her, waiting upon her footsteps,

sympathising with her pensive mood, with that instinctive politeness of the southern, which is almost as great a delight to the stranger from the hard, cold, practical north, as the colour of the southern sea, or the ever-varying beauty of the hills.

“Will you show me the place where the English lady fell over the cliff?” Mildred asked; and the woman went with her along the winding road, and then upward to a path along the crest of a cliff, a cliff that seemed low on account of those bolder heights which rose above it, and which screened this eastward-fronting shore of the little peninsula from all the world of the west. The carriage-road wound southward up to the higher ground, but Mildred and her guide followed a footpath which had been trodden on the long rank grass beside the cliff. The rosemary bushes were full of flower: pale, cold gray blossoms, as befitted the herb of death, and a great yellow weed made patches of vivid colour among the blue-gray stones scattered in the long grass on the slope of the hill.

“It was somewhere along this pathway, madame,” said the woman. “I cannot tell you the exact spot.

Some fishermen from Beaulieu picked her up," pointing across the blue water of the bay to a semicircle of yellow sand, with a few white houses scattered along the curving road, and some boats lying keel upward on the beach. "She never spoke again. She was dead when they found her there."

"Did they see her fall?"

"No, madame."

"And yet people have dared to call her husband a murderer."

"Ah, but, madame, it was the general opinion. Was it not his guilty conscience that drove him mad? He came here once only after he left the madhouse, wandered about the village for an hour or two, went up to the cemetery and looked once—but once only—at the poor lady's grave, and then drove away as if devils were hunting him. Who can doubt that it was his hand that sent her to her death?"

"No one would believe it who knew him."

"Everybody at St. Jean believed it, even the people who liked him best."

Mildred turned from her sick at heart. She gave the woman some more money, and then with

briefest adieu walked back to the inn where she had left the carriage, and where the horse was dozing with his nose in a bag of dried locust fruit, while his driver sprawled half asleep upon the rough stone parapet between the inn and the bay.

Pamela received her aunt graciously on her return to the hotel, and seemed in better spirits than she had been since she left Pallanza.

“Your Lady Lochinvar has written me the sweetest little note, asking me to dine with her and go to the opera afterwards,” she said. “I feel sure this must be your doing, aunt.”

“No, dear. I only told her that I had a very nice niece moping at the hotel, and very tired of my dismal company.”

“Tired of you? No, no, aunt. You know better than that. I should no more grow tired of you than I should of Box,” intending to make the most flattering comparison; “only he had made himself a part of our lives at Pallanza, don’t you know, and one could not help missing him.” (The pronoun meant Castellani, and not the dog.) “I am glad I am

going to the opera after all, even if it does remind me of him; and it's awfully kind of Lady Lochinvar to send her carriage for me. : I only waited to see you before I began to dress."

"Go, dearest; and take care to look your prettiest."

"And you won't mind dining alone?"

"I shall be delighted to know you are enjoying yourself."

The prospect of an evening's solitude was an infinite relief to Mildred. She breathed more freely when Pamela had gone dancing off to the lift, a fluffy, feathery mass of whiteness, with hooded head and rosy face peeping from a border of white fox. The tall door of the *salon* closed upon her with a solemn reverberation, and Mildred was alone with her own thoughts, alone with the history of her husband's past life, now that she had unravelled the tangled skein and knew all.

She was face to face with the past, and how did it seem in her eyes? Was there no doubt, no agonising fear that the man she had loved as a husband might have slain the girl she had loved as a sister?

All those people, those simple and disinterested villagers, who had liked George Ransome well enough for his own sake, had yet believed him guilty : they who had been on the spot, and had had the best opportunities for judging the case rightly.

Could she doubt him, she who had seen honour and fine feeling in every act of his life? She remembered the dream — that terrible dream which had occurred at intervals; sometimes once in a year; sometimes oftener; that awe-inspiring dream which had shaken the dreamer's nerves as nothing but a vision of horror could have shaken them, from which he had awakened more dead than alive, completely unnerved, cold drops upon his pallid brow, his hands convulsed and icy, his eyes glassy as death itself. The horror of that dream even to her, who beheld its effect on the dreamer, was a horror not to be forgotten.

Was it the dream of a murderer, acting his crime over again in that dim world of sleep, living over again the moment of his temptation and his fall? No, no! Another might so interpret the vision, but not his wife.

“I know him,” she repeated to herself passionately; “I know him. I know his noble heart. He is incapable of one cruel impulse. He could not have done such a deed. There is no possible state of feeling, no moment of frenzy, in which he would have been false to his character and his manhood.”

And then she asked herself if Fay had not been her sister, if there had not been that insurmountable bar to her union with George Greswold, would her knowledge of his first wife’s fate, and the suspicion that had darkened his name, have sufficed to part them? Could she, knowing what she now knew, knowing that he had been so suspected, knowing that it was beyond his power ever to *prove* his guiltlessness—could she have gone through the rest of her life with him, honouring him and trusting him as she had done in the years that were gone?

She told herself that she could have so trusted him; that she could have honoured and loved him to the end, pitying him for those dark experiences, but with faith unshaken.

“A murderer and a madman,” she said to herself, repeating Castellani’s calumny. “Murderer I

would never believe him ; and shall I honour him less because that sensitive mind was plunged in darkness by the horror of his wife's fate ?”

Pamela came home before midnight. Lady Lochinvar had driven her to the door. She was in high spirits, and charmed with her ladyship, and thought her ladyship's nephew, Mr. Stuart, late of a famous Highland regiment, a rather agreeable person.

“He is decidedly plain,” said Pamela, “and looks about as intellectual as Sir Henry Mountford, and he evidently doesn't care a jot for music ; but he has very pleasant manners, and he told me a lot about Monte Carlo. A brother officer of his, bronchial, with a very nice wife, came to Lady Lochinvar's box in the evening, and she is going to call for me to-morrow afternoon, to take me to the tennis-ground at the Cercle de la Méditerranée, if you don't mind.”

“My dearest, you know I wish only to see you happy and with nice people. I suppose this lady, whose name you have not told me—”

“Mrs. Murray. She is very Scotch, but quite

charming—nothing fast or rowdy about her—and devoted to her invalid husband. He does not play tennis, poor fellow, but he sits in the sun and looks on, which is very nice for him.”

Mrs. Murray made her appearance at two o'clock next day, and Mildred was pleased to find that Pamela had not exaggerated her merits. She was very Scotch, and talked of Lady Lochinvar as “a purpose woman,” with a Caledonian roll of the *r* in purpose which emphasised the word in its adjectival sense. She had very pretty simple manners, and was altogether the kind of young matron with whom a feather-headed girl might be trusted.

Directly Pamela and her new friend had departed Mildred put on her bonnet, and went out on foot. She had made certain inquiries through Albrecht, and she knew the way she had to go upon the pilgrimage on which she was bent, a pilgrimage of sorrowful memory. There was a relief in being quite alone upon the long parade between the palm-trees and the sea, and to know that she was free from notice and sympathy for the rest of the afternoon.

She walked to the Place Massena, and there

accepted the beseeching offers of one of the numerous flymen, and took her seat in a light victoria behind a horse which looked a little better fed than his neighbours. She told the man to drive along the west bank of the Paillon, on the road to St. André.

Would not Madame go to St. André, and see the wonderful grotto, and the petrifications ?

No, Madame did not wish to go so far as St. André. She would tell the driver where to stop.

The horse rattled off at a brisk pace. They are no crawlers, those flies of the South. They drove past the smart shops and hotels on the quay ; past the shabby old inn where the diligences put up, a hostelry with suggestions of the past, when the old Italian town was not a winter rendezvous for all the nations, the beaten track of Yankee and Cockney, *calicot* and counter-jumper, Russian prince and Hebrew capitalist, millionaire and adventurer. They drove past the shabby purlieus of the town, workmen's lodging-houses, sordid-looking shops, then an orange-garden here and there within crumbling plaster walls, and here and there a tavern in a shabby garden. To the left of the river, on a sharp pinnacle

of hill, stood the Monastery of Cimies, with dome and tower dominating the landscape. Further away, on the other side of the stony torrent-bed, rose the rugged chain of hills stretching away to Mentone and the Italian frontier, and high up against the blue sky glimmered the white domes of the Observatory. They came by and by to a spot where, by the side of the broad high-road, there was a wall enclosing a white dusty yard, and behind it a long white house with many windows, bare and barren, staring blankly at the dry bed of the torrent and the rugged brown hills beyond. At each end of the long white building there was a colonnade with iron bars, open to the sun and the air, and as Mrs. Greswold's carriage drew near a man's voice rolled out the opening bars of "Ah, che la morte!" in a tremendous baritone. A cluster of idlers had congregated about the open gate, to stare and listen; for the great white house was a madhouse, and the grated colonnades right and left of the long façade were the recreation-grounds of the insane—of those worst patients who could not be trusted to wander at their ease in the garden, or to dig and delve upon the breezy hills towards St. André.

The singer was a fine-looking man, dressed in loose garments of some white material, and with long white gloves. He flung himself on to an upper bar of the grating with the air of an athlete, and hung upon the bars with his gloved hands, facing that cluster of loafers as if they had been an audience in a theatre, and singing with all the power of a herculean physique. Mildred told her driver to stop at the gate, and she sat listening while the madman sang, in fitful snatches of a few bars at a time, but with never a false note.

That cage, and the patients' pacing up and down, or hanging on to the bars, or standing staring at the little crowd round the gate, moved her to deepest pity, touched her with keenest pain. He had been here, her beloved, in that brief interval of darkest night. She recalled how in one of his awakenings from that torturing dream he had spoken words of strange meaning—or of no meaning, as they had seemed to her then.

“The cage—the cage again!” he had cried in an agonised voice; “iron bars—like a wild beast!”

These words had been an enigma to her then. She saw the answer to the riddle *here*.

She sat for some time watching that sad spectacle, hearing those broken snatches of song, with intervals of silence, or sometimes a wild peal of laughter.

The loiterers were full of speculations and assertions. The porter at the gate answered some questions, turned a deaf ear to others.

The singer was a Spanish nobleman who had lost a fortune at Monte Carlo the night before, and had been brought here bound hand and foot at early morning. He had tried to kill himself, and now he imagined himself a famous singer, and that the barred colonnade was the stage of the Grand Opéra at Paris.

"He'll soon be all right again," said the porter with a careless shrug; "those violent cases mend quickly."

"But he won't get his money back again, poor devil," said one of the loiterers, a flyman whose vehicle was standing by the wall, waiting for a customer. "Hard to recover his senses and find himself without a sou."

“ O, he has rich friends, no doubt. Look at his white kid gloves. He is young and handsome, and he has a splendid voice. Somebody will take care of him. Do you see that old woman sitting over there in the garden? You would not think there was anything amiss with her, would you? No more there is, only she thinks she is the Blessed Virgin. She has been here five-and-thirty years. Nobody pities *her*—nobody inquires about *her*. My father remembers her when she was a handsome young woman at a flower-shop on the Quai Massena, one of the merriest girls in Nice. Somebody told her she was neglecting her soul and going to hell. This set her thinking too much. She used to be at the Cathedral all day, and at confession as often as the priest would hear her. She neglected her shop, and quarrelled with her mother and sisters. She said she had a vocation; and then one fine day she walked to the Cathedral in a white veil, with a bunch of lilies in her hand, and she told all the people she met that they ought to kneel before her and make the sign of the cross, for she was the Mother of God. Three days afterwards her people brought her here. She

would neither eat nor drink, and she never closed her eyes, or left off talking about her glorious mission, which was to work the redemption of all the women upon earth."

"Drive on to the doctor's house," Mildred said presently; and the fly went on a few hundred yards, and then drew up at the door of a private house, which marked the boundary of the asylum garden.

Mrs. Greswold had inquired the name of the doctor of longest experience in the asylum, and she had been referred to Monsieur Leroy, the inhabitant of this house, where the flyman informed her some of the more wealthy patients were lodged. She had come prepared with a little note requesting the favour of an interview, and enclosing her card, with the address of Enderby Manor as well as her hotel in Nice. The English manor and the Hôtel Westminster indicated at least respectability in the applicant; and Monsieur Leroy's reception was both prompt and courteous.

He was a clever-looking man, about sixty years of age, with a fine benevolent head, and an attentive eye, as of one always on the alert. He had spent

five-and-thirty of his sixty years in the society of the deranged, and had devoted all his intellectual power to the study of mental disease.

After briefest preliminary courtesies, Mildred explained the purpose of her visit.

"I am anxious to learn anything you can tell me about a patient who was under your care—or, at least, in this establishment—seventeen years ago, and in whom I am deeply interested," she said.

"Seventeen years is a long time, madame, but I have a good memory, and I keep notes of all my cases. I may be able to satisfy your curiosity in some measure. What was the name of this patient?"

"He was an Englishman called Ransome—George Ransome. He was placed here under peculiar circumstances."

"*Corpo di Bacco!* I should say they were peculiar, very peculiar circumstances!" exclaimed the doctor. "Do you know, madame, that Mr. Ransome came here as a suspected murderer? He came straight from the gaol at Villefranche, where he had been detained on the suspicion of having killed his wife."

“There was not one jot of evidence to support such a charge. I know all the circumstances. Surely, sir, you, who must have a wide knowledge of human nature, did not think him guilty?”

“I hardly made up my mind upon that point, even after I had seen him almost every day for six months; but there is one thing I do know about this unhappy gentleman: his lunacy was no assumption, put on to save him from the consequences of a crime. He was a man of noble intellect, large brain-power, and for the time being his reason was totally obscured.”

“To what cause did you attribute the attack?”

“A long period of worry, nerves completely shattered, and finally the shock of that catastrophe on the cliff. Whether his hand pushed her to her death, or the woman flung her life away, the shock was too much for Mr. Ransome’s weakened and worried brain. All the indications of his malady, from the most violent stages to the gradual progress of recovery, pointed to the same conclusion. The history of the case revealed its cause and its earlier phases: an unhappy marriage, a jealous wife,

patience and forbearance on his part, until patience degenerated into despair, the dull apathy of a wearied intellect. All that is easy to understand."

"You pitied him, then, monsieur?"

"Madame, I pity all my patients; but I found in Mr. Ransome a man of exceptional characteristics, and his case interested me deeply."

"You would not have been interested had you believed him guilty?"

"Pardon me, madame, crime is full of interest for the pathologist. The idea that this gentleman might have spurned his wife from him in a moment of aberration would not have lessened my interest in his mental condition. But although I have never made up my mind upon the question of his guilt or innocence, I am bound to tell you, since you seem even painfully interested in his history, that his conduct after his recovery indicated an open and generous nature, a mind of peculiar refinement, and a great deal of chivalrous feeling. I had many conversations with him during the period of returning reason, and I formed a high opinion of his moral character."

“Did other people think him guilty—the people he had known in Nice, for instance?”

“I fancy there were very few who thought much about him,” answered the doctor. “Luckily for him and his belongings—whoever they might be—he had dropped out of society for some time before the catastrophe, and he had never been a person of importance in Nice. He had not occupied a villa, or given parties. He lived with his wife at an hotel, and the man who lives at an hotel counts for very little on the Riviera. He is only a casual visitor, who may come and go as he pleases. His movements—unless he has rank or fashion or inordinate wealth to recommend him—excite no interest. He is not a personage. Hence there was very little talk about the lamentable end of Mr. Ransome’s married life. There were hardly half-a-dozen paragraphs in our local papers, all told; and I doubt if those were quoted in the *Figaro* or *Galignani*. My patient might congratulate himself upon his obscurity.”

“Did no one from England visit him during his confinement here?”

“No one. The local authorities looked after

his interests so far as to take care of the ready money which was found in his house, and which sufficed to pay for the poor lady's funeral and for my patient's expenses, leaving a balance to be handed over to him on his recovery. From the hour he left these gates I never heard from him or of him again; but every new year has brought me an anonymous gift from London, such a gift as only a person of refined taste would choose, and I have attributed those annual greetings to Mr. George Ransome."

"It would be only like him to remember past kindness."

"You know him well, madame?"

"Very well; so well as to be able to answer with my life for his being incapable of the crime of which even you, who saw so much of him, hesitate to acquit him."

"It is my misfortune, madame, to have seen the darker sides of the human mind, and to know that in the whitest life there may be one black spot—one moment of sin which stultifies a lifetime of virtue. However, it is possible that your judgment is right in this particular case. Be assured I should

be glad to think so, and glad to know that Mr. Ransome's after days have been all sunshine."

A sigh was Mildred's only answer. Monsieur Leroy saw tears in her eyes, and asked no more. He was shrewd enough to guess her connection with his former patient—a second wife, no doubt. No one but a wife would be so intensely interested.

"If there is anything I can do for you, or for my old patient—" he began, seeing that his visitor lingered.

"O, no, there is nothing—except if you would let me see the rooms in which he lived."

"Assuredly. It is a melancholy pleasure, at best, to recall the sorrows we have outlived, but the association will be less painful in your case since the—friend in whom you are interested was so speedily and so thoroughly restored to mental health. I take it that he has never had a relapse?"

"Never, thank God!"

"It was not likely, from the history of the case."

He led the way across a vestibule and up-stairs to the second floor, where he showed Mrs. Greswold two airy rooms, sitting-room and bedroom communi-

cating, overlooking the valley towards Cimies, with the white-walled convent on the crest of the hill, and the white temples of the dead clustering near it; cross and column, Athenian pediment and Italian cupola, dazzling white against the cloudless blue. The rooms were neatly furnished, and there was every appearance of comfort; no suggestion of Bedlam, padded walls, or strait-waistcoats.

“Had he these rooms all the time?” asked Mildred.

“Not all the time. He was somewhat difficult to deal with during the first few weeks, and he was in the main building, under the care of one of my subordinates, till improvement began. By that time I had grown interested in his case, and took him into my own house.”

“Pray let me see the rooms he occupied at first, monsieur; I want to know all. I want to be able to understand what his life was like in that dark dream.”

She knew now what his own dream meant.

Monsieur Leroy indulged her whim. He took

her across the dusty garden to the great white house—a house of many windows and long corridors, airy, bare, hopeless-looking, as it seemed to that sad visitor. She saw the two iron-barred enclosures, and the restless creatures roaming about them, clinging to the bars, climbing like monkeys from perch to perch, hanging from the trapeze. The Spaniard had left off singing.

She was shown George Ransome's room, which was empty. The bare whitewashed walls chilled her as if she had gone into an ice-vault. Here on everything there was the stamp of a State prison—iron bars, white walls, a deadly monotony. She was glad to escape into the open air again, but not until she had knelt for some minutes beside the narrow bed upon which George Ransome had lain seventeen years ago, and thanked God for his restoration of reason, and prayed that his declining days might be blessed. She prayed for him, to whom she might nevermore be the source of happiness, she who until so lately had been his nearest and dearest upon earth.

A law which she recognised as duty had risen up between them, and both must go down to the grave in sadness rather than that law should be broken.

END OF VOL. II.

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